



ABERRANT

Forceful Personalities



Idols. Squids. Grifters. Charmers.

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Shawn Henley and Jack Summanen



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DEDICATION

Words from the Developers

It's finally happened. **Aberrant: Forceful Personalities** has now become a finished product, and is now available to be read and hopefully enjoyed. We've changed the format a bit from what you'll find in other **Aberrant** sourcebooks, namely excluding the fluff and interior artwork, for two reasons. First, we wanted this fanbook to be produced as soon as was possible. EON's fanbook projects tend to be slow-going, usually due to the interference of real life, and **Forceful Personalities** was no exception. Second, we hoped to avoid the argument over what Mega-Attractive novas should look like. Good art takes time, even without the endless debates we would've had over whether or not a finished work was accurate. Hopefully, all of the extra material we've piled into this fanbook will make up for the lack of ornamentation. We folks on the Development Team have done our best on this project, and you can't really ask for more than that.

What you're either holding in your hands or viewing on your computer monitor right now may have started with a few of my ideas, but it took the ideas and hard work of a whole slew of EON's posters to turn EON's Mega-Social fanbook from a dream into concrete reality. My heartfelt thanks to all of those wonderful folks at EON who made this book possible. I'd also like to thank all those other people on the Web who are helping to keep **Aberrant** and the other Aeon Continuum games alive.

— Shawn "Sprocket" Henley

I share a passion for this game with Sprocket and the rest of the Development Team. I first experienced the Aeonverse through the eyes of **Aberrant**, and what a world it was. It was not until 2000 that I even looked at **Adventure!** or **Trinity**, so forgive me for being biased, **Aberrant** has been my friend much longer. Because of my relationship with the world of **Aberrant** I spend a great deal of my time in the Aeonverse immersed in the **Aberrant** era.

The World of **Aberrant** has inspired me as well as so many other people, by taking stories of human conflict and human achievement and elevating them to superhuman levels, bringing dramas out of mythology to the tabletop.

With **Forceful Personalities** I initially wanted to explore every aspect of the game (social, mental and physical), but I knew this would not be possible (nor fair to the subject matter); just as when White Wolf signaled the line's end I felt a panic set in, knowing that the story was incomplete. When I learned of end of the Aeonverse I rushed out and bought every book available in the line for all three core books, so hungry was I for more. So I see this book as a small treat for similarly desperate fans, carefully focused on the purely social gems of **Aberrant** game play.

From my passion to play I discovered a need to share. When I read the Mega-Mental book **Brainwaves** online I fell in love with the "mega-nova" again, and I practically wept with

frustration when none of the other themed books were forthcoming. Eventually I realized that maybe I was the one delaying, waiting for myself to join the effort.

Thank you for letting us share,

— Jack "Gideon" Summanen

Special Thanks:

- To Rob Hatch and the fine folks at White Wolf, for lighting the Aeon Continuum's flame in the first place.
- To archer21 and Wish, for keeping EON afloat when it was in danger of going down for the third time.

Passion • Inspiration • Dedication

I'd like to thank everyone involved in this project. Everyone gave so freely of their own time and effort to make this e-book a wonderful reality. Their commitment and teamwork is what makes EONOnline such a fantastic resource for players around the world.

So again, a huge thanks from me to all of you; You did good, guys. Real good. I can't wait to see what's next!

Your EON Admin,

— Stephen "Archer" Quick

INTRODUCTION

*"Will you walk into my parlour?" said the spider to the fly
 "Tis the prettiest little parlour that ever you did spy,
 The way into my parlour is up a winding stair,
 And I've a many curious things to shew when you are there"...*
 – "The Spider and the Fly," by Mary Howitt

Forceful Personalities is the first fanbook of the **Aberrant** setting that examines the potential and the ramifications of Mega-Socials in the Nova Age. This sourcebook was guided by the work completed in the unofficial Mega-Mental sourcebook **Brainwaves**, and inspired by the fine folks at White Wolf.

Sexy, Savvy, and in-control, Mega-Socially gifted novas have dominated the media and backroom dealings of the world from the get-go. From drop dead gorgeous models, to spokespersons and lawyers that always get their way, these socially adept novas have broken all the rules of etiquette and blackmail. Virtually anyone can be bought, broken or converted if left in the hands of a determined nova socialite.

There is also a growing public consciousness of the risk such novas present in an ever-evolving world. What baseline can compete with a nova that can literally possess anything or anyone they desire?

Idols in Aberrant

Idols, Glamour-Boys and Glamour-Girls, describe the stunning presence of these men and women of superhuman grace and fashion. It is said you can learn about an era by how it defines beauty, if so, this is indeed the Nova age.

In the **Aberrant** world these men and women of beauty are the social darlings of the world. Everyone wants to be seen with them, their presence is demanded at the biggest social gatherings, and their images are found across the OpNet. With their beauty they attract fans and stalkers, jealousy and envy. Rarely does a nova with any degree of Mega-Appearance escape such attention.

The greatest impact Idols have made in baseline society is in the fashion world, where their super-human grace makes any old rag look decent. Even a hideous fashion will become popular if a nova wears it and his fans see him in it. This new form of fashion warfare has caused more than a few squabbles and legal battles over images and likenesses.

Squids in Aberrant

Squids. Gargoyles. Terrors of the night. Terms like these are only fitting to describe the fear-inducing, nauseating and blood-curdling effect these novas have on the human psyche. In the shadows of the beautiful and bold lurk the pariahs, the misfits and the monsters of this age.

Denied the blessing of a positive self-image, the Squids are instead beings of degraded, often bestial, appearances. Much like the Idols, Squids are ever the targets of the media, which waits for them to prove that they are as monstrous in mind and spirit as they are in body.

Of all the Mega-Social novas, Squids may have had the greatest impact on the baseline world. Their hideous appearances - their ability to inspire fear and loathing - have drawn the worlds' frightened eyes to their lives. Some such novas have made the best of their ugly form by becoming cult monsters in movies, or terrifying enforcers for elite organizations. But others must simply learn how to cope with their unenviable new identity: the neighborhood freak.

Grifters in Aberrant

Grifters or Dealers are the master manipulators of backroom deals in **Aberrant** and are icons for baseline politicians and main-line media stars with an almost perverse need for control.

In the **Aberrant** world these shadowy dealers are rarely recognized for the powerhouses they are, except for the few daredevils that chance discovery for the brief fame it brings. Most Grifters spend their days convincing others to do their bidding, "for their own benefit."

Grifters have had their greatest impact, not from what they have done, but from what certain organizations fear they might do. Organizations like the Directive, UN Security Council, and the British MI-5 all have detailed plans of what to do if they detect nova manipulation of their organizations or their governments. These baselines stay awake nights fearing the damage such a monster could inflict on the world.

Charmers in Aberrant

Charmers, Friendlies, the person you can't stand to hate. Charmers fill the needed role of confidant and continue to convince millions of people that there's still someone honest out there.

In the **Aberrant** world the Charmers are not necessarily the most beautiful, or the most successful, but they always have friends willing to help them out. They are known to be good listeners, vibrant speakers, inspirational leaders, or the best friend one could hope for. These social novas are the most beloved by those who know them, and their charm is the hardest to pin down by baseline fans.

Charmers are known as the spokespersons and public faces of many organizations, they are negotiators first, dealmakers second (many Charmers have at least a dot in Mega-Manipulation). A Charmer's life revolves around their social calendar, as the more they interact with others the more power they gain. Businesses and organizations like Utopia and DeVries have capitalized on this to make them powers in the baseline world.

Forceful Personalities looks at these charming novas and the implications their powers have for their wielders and the surrounding baselines, as well as, the impact of Idols, Squids and Grifters on bystanders and their possessors.

How to Use This Book

Integrating Mega-Social novas into a campaign is fairly straightforward, but help is needed to keep one step ahead of them. This book is meant to give you some insight how you can rein in - or unleash - your Idols, Squids, Grifters and Charmers.

In Chapter One: Faces of the World find out about some of the organizations that have formed to support the Mega-Social specialists, including some truly bizarre groups. Storytellers will want to check out Chapter Three: Storytelling, to learn about some solid strategies to help keep socially minded novas engaged. Players can jump right into Chapter Two: Social Engineering, to see what new possibilities awaits the Mega-Social nova and then go to Chapter Four, where new enhancements and discussions for ways to optimize Mega-Social novas await.

Contents

Forceful Personalities is divided into four chapters:

- **Ch 1: Faces of the World:** This chapter highlights organizations and individuals that focus on and utilize this set of Mega-Attributes throughout the world.
- **Ch 2: Social Engineering:** This chapter discusses the effects and applications of Social Warfare, how Mega-Social novas can shake up a normal story and introduces Adversarial Backgrounds.
- **Ch 3: Storytelling:** This chapter introduces some ideas to protect your storylines from over the top novas and also strategies to keep your socially oriented nova engaged in the plot. Also included are rules designed to handle issues of brainwashing and Mega-Manipulation induced suicides.
- **Ch 4: Frightening, Wonderful Behavior:** In this chapter are new enhancements, aberrations and a few good strategies for using your Social Mega-Attributes to accomplish the most.

*... "Oh no, no," said the little Fly, "to ask me is in vain,
For who goes up your winding stair, can ne'er come down again."*
— "The Spider and the Fly," by Mary Howitt

Lexicon

- **Amped:** Slang term meaning that a place, thing, or person is about to suffer severe damage; usually at the hands of one or more novas. Following the violence that destroyed the Amp Room in the summer of 2015, many baselines used this term in statements like, "I knew things were about to get Amped, so I split."
- **Breeder:** Somewhat derogatory (and occasionally envious) slang term for both fertile baselines and fertile novas that developed after the reality of widespread infertility among novas became public knowledge in the nova community.
- **Drone:** a derogatory term, often used in conjunction with Queen Bee, to describe the apparent mindlessness of those who flock to "hang out" with their queen.
- **Charmer:** A nova that has a well-developed Mega-Charisma Attribute, and usually large amounts of social skills.
- **Cult:** A group of people centered on a specific goal or ideal that tries to keep its members separate from outside influences; typically their prior beliefs, their families, and mainstream society in general.
- **Gargoyles:** Derisive slang term for novas who radiate negative emotions and use them as weapons against the emotionally pliable. (This term originated in Spain and Ibiza when a group of such novas showed up at the Amp Room on the night of October 31, 2011 and tried to scare everyone out).
- **Girl/Boy Friday:** A mildly derogatory slang term describing a loyal and/or doting baseline lover or close friend of a nova. These individuals tend to be clueless about the current social tensions about novas.
- **Grifter:** A nova that develops their Mega-Manipulation to high levels, or combines Mega-Perception with a moderate amount of Mega-Manipulation.
- **Horror:** A label for Mega-Ugly novas that engender a sense of abomination and raw fear at first glance, even over OpNet broadcasts. This catch-all term defines the novas that have advanced beyond visages of mere atrocity, whether a Squid or a Gargoyle, and have forced the media to create a new viewer's warning rating, "Hr".
- **Idol:** A nova with a high Mega-Appearance. This is a specific type of nova that deals with the world through their looks and grace.
- **Lackey:** A mostly derogatory term for a nova or baseline that spends their free-time doing the general bidding of a Mega-Social nova.
- **Moth:** Derogatory, piteous term for those drawn to a mega-social nova, like a moth to the flame of their beauty/charm...
- **Queen Bee:** A (frequently female) nova that makes a habit of gathering many baselines around her to do her bidding, or just to do the cooking.
- **Squid:** A derogatory term for Mega-Ugly novas, that is becoming more common in usage as the preponderance of tentacles on Mega-Ugly novas increases.

CHAPTER ONE: FACES OF THE WORLD

Introduction

The world of **Aberrant** is full of people looking to make their next big score, to make it “big”, and people who are afraid to be alone. Those lucky enough to be a nova rarely have any trouble getting what they want, and some specialize in it. In this chapter we delve into a collection of such people from loners that want to change the world, to manipulative leaders that want to rule it, one soul at a time. While none of the novas in this chapter will topple Utopia or compete with Divis Mal they can ruin the life of a character’s loved one, they can corrupt or infiltrate a local business, or can perpetrate any number of subtle attacks on the nova’s personal connections.

If Mega-Physical novas are the foot soldiers of the nova age, and the Mega-Mental novas are the generals, the Mega-Social novas are the Banners for their armies, leading baseline and nova alike to their sometimes twisted visions of the future.

House of Cards

Throughout history there have been men and women who captured the interest, the passion and the innocence of the world. From Joan of Arc who raised the spirits, hearts and faith of thousands by her faith and determination to JFK who knew how to show a jaded public hope, such **Forceful Personalities** were rare gems, cherished by their peers and public. In this nova age, such personalities seem to be popping up every day, with the N! news network and special interest groups snapping them up to be paraded before the masses. It would seem that such a deluge of personality would jade the masses, but quite the opposite it has elevated the public excitement into a frenzy, where the rules are only followed loosely, and broken whenever it’s convenient. In this chapter we focus on a few **Forceful Personalities** that may help inspire Storytellers and players alike, to find the true diamond in the rough, and expose a few masquerades too.

Jacob Smite

Background: Some people are just born to lose, or in this case, be a loser.

Jacob Smite was a dimwitted pathological liar with no work ethic, no morals, no willpower, and a heavy gambling habit. Eruption didn’t change any of that. He erupted trying to talk a girl into believing one of his lies, and was having trouble because he had just told a conflicting lie a few hours earlier.

He very much wanted to get her to see the world through his eyes, and then he was somehow able to do just that. That got him his first slave/follower. She took him home and nursed him until his headaches passed. Jacob dumped her soon afterwards, causing her to commit suicide out of despair.

Since then, Jacob’s method of operating is simple. He finds a rich baseline (preferably a young woman), and convinces her to accept his Psychic Link. Since he keeps his Awe-Inspiring enhancement up almost all the time, they quickly believe on an emotional level that Jacob is, quite literally, divine. Jacob then has them spend all of their money on his pleasures, but eventually the money runs out. He then drops her like a hot rock and moves on.

By that time, one of Jacob’s followers will have been living with a divine presence that was constantly in her mind for months, and being effectively cast out of Heaven is devastating. Some followers end up killing themselves, while others turn to some sort of criminal activity in a misguided attempt to regain Jacob’s “favor”. But no matter what they do, by that point Jacob’s ex-followers will have nothing left in the way of financial resources. The few of these unfortunates who have turned to the police have been written off as lunatics or liars. The fact that Jacob always refers to himself as “God” in his mental exchanges with his followers doesn’t help matters any.

Image: Jacob is a short Caucasian, perhaps 5 and a half feet tall. He is also slight of build and his dark hair is normally unwashed. He could be anyone of dozens of people in high school who seemed to pick up the wrong type of attention from various bullies. He sports a pencil thin mustache in a vain attempt to look older. He’s 25 but could pass for “late high school”. When “Mr. Nobody” is on he seems like every mousy white man/boy that has ever lived, not that this is much different from normal.

In person he seems much more believable and earnest than should be possible considering the quality of his lies. It isn’t until someone is away from him for a bit that they realize some of his statements were conflicting.

Over his mental link his presence is awesome. His every statement rings with authority and even divinity. Not all of his words make sense when matched with each other, but any logic issues are obviously a problem with mortal perspective.

Roleplaying Hints: Lie. It doesn’t matter if you told someone else a conflicting lie a few seconds ago and they are standing right there, tell whoever you are talking to whatever they want to hear. Say it as though you believe it (because you do) and be sure that whatever you say puts you in the best light possible.

Gear: Wallet with cash and nothing else. Not even a cell phone or credit card.

Nature: Hedonist

Allegiance: None

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Appearance 2, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Endurance 3, Intimidation 1, Melee 1, Rapport 1, Resistance 3, Seduction 3, Streetwise 3, Style 1, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Cipher 2, Node 2; Followers 5 (three wealthy baseline fanatics)

Merits and Flaws: Addicted to Gambling (-2), Compulsion: Lying (-2)

Quantum 1, Quantum Pool 22, Willpower 3, Taint 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Appearance •• (Awe Inspiring*, Mr. Nobody), Mega-Manipulation •• (Trickster, Persuader), Mega-Charisma •• (Dreadful Mien)

Quantum Powers: Psychic Link • (x3)**, Psychic Shield •••

* Jacob's Mega-Appearance and Awe Inspiring only function over his Psychic Link

** Jacob's followers can't talk to each other over his Psychic Link, only to him.

Methods and Operations

As far as his three followers are concerned (he rarely allows himself more than three at a time), Jacob is their God. They know and understand this, even if they can't quite put it into words. Jacob's activities normally involve blowing obscene amounts of money...not that he ever does this himself. Instead, Jacob's followers burn through their own money at his urgings. Normally, one of his followers will go on gambling and spending binges, which Jacob experiences vicariously through his Psychic Link. Jacob is utterly incompetent as a gambler, but since he always keeps another rich follower on hand, he just keeps coming back for more. The other two will manage Jacob's living expenses and financial affairs, usually liquidating their own considerable financial assets in the process.

- **Allies and Enemies:** So far Jacob has managed to stay below the radar of most of the major organizations. Jacob doesn't break any laws, and as a Quantum 1 nova with no Taint, he can easily pass for a baseline. Jacob is aware that he's a nova; but he's also painfully aware of how weak he is in comparison to other novas, and so avoids them like the plague. Since he mostly operates through his followers, they wind up getting the blame for all of Jacob's misdeeds, which include racking up a fair number of rather large bad debts to the Camparelli-Zhukov Megasyndicate. The C-Z Megasyndicate still hasn't figured out that Jacob is the true source of the bad debts, nor have they realized that he's a nova. Once they do, Jacob will more than likely wind up in a C-Z nova-rendering plant; where his body will be processed into Soma, Mite, and a host of other nova-derived drugs. But between Jacob's Mr. Nobody enhancement and his other Mega-Social abilities, that day may be a long time coming.

George Paulus

Background: George always knew he was destined for great things. He made sure to earn them as well. When he was in high school, he was the captain of the debate team. He always got straight "A"s on his report cards. He was even voted by his classmates as "Most Likely to Succeed". Everything was going his way, until he graduated college and tried to break into state politics.

Everything was so different. He couldn't seem to get the general public to hear his message. It didn't help that George was a liberal (one of the few four-letter words in American politics) in the Bible Belt of the United States of America. His views were widely unpopular, and he was often publicly reviled in the local churches. It seemed George's political career was in the gutter in his home state, until he was cornered by some "good ol' boys" who didn't like his progressive views and didn't want him spreading them anywhere else.

He looked at them as they approached menacingly and started to talk, and somehow gently convinced them to leave him alone. The next week he had to drop out of the race he was in and went to the hospital for intense headaches. He quickly found out that people acted differently around him, and then he was told he had erupted. Since then he has been biding his time, waiting for the next big chance for him to get elected into a good office.

Image: George is a 6' 4" tall caucasian man with blue eyes and impeccably styled short red hair. He's not well-muscled by any standard, but is reasonably fit and weighs in at about 200 lbs. He prefers to wear hand-tailored suits in various colors. George looks to be about 28 years old, but has the knowledgeable attitude of a man twice his age.

Roleplaying Hints: You are the next big thing and you know it! You have big plans for the United States...no, the world! You won't give in on the issues, and you are a bit mule-headed.

Gear: Cell phone, PDA

Nature: Leader

Allegiance: Democratic Party.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Appearance 3, Manipulation 4, Charisma 4.

Abilities: Academics 4, Awareness 1, Biz 4, Bureaucracy 4, Command 4, Etiquette 4, Firearms 1, Investigation 1, Linguistics 5 (English native, whatever other languages the Storyteller decides that he needs), Martial Arts 2, Rapport 3, Style 3, Subterfuge 3.

Backgrounds: Contacts 1 (Tom Blinkin, head researcher for the NY Times), Followers 4 (various underlings and gofers used for legwork), Resources 3.

Merits and Flaws: None.

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 6, Taint 2.

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Intelligence • (Analyze Weakness, Linguistic Genius), Mega-Appearance •• (Almost Live, First Impression, Mirroring), Mega-Manipulation ••• (Overwhelming Question), Mega-Charisma •••• (Natural Agitator).

Quantum Powers: None.

Gazali

Background: When Gazali was born, it is said, the heavens shook with thunder and frogs fell like rain from the sky. While it is not known anymore if that is actually *true*, no one who knows him can deny how special the man is now.

Gazali was born in 1953 under a good omen to a line of shamans of the Muhati, a very small tribe of animist Nilotes living deep in one of the tropical jungles of southern Sudan. He took to his heritage as well as any boy his age would. He slowly learned, and became proficient at using natural herbal medicines to heal wounds and cure sickness. When he reached the proper age in 1962, he went on his quest to become a man. When he reached the center of the jungle he carefully searched for the largest termite mound he could find, then started taking termites out of it and put them in a large mitt-like glove. Once the glove was filled with the small insects, Gazali took a deep breath and stuck his hand in. The pain seemed to be without end as hundreds of the insects bit into his flesh. Feeling that he could take no more, Gazali silently willed the insects to stop. To his amazement, the termites obeyed him. The pain from the termites' bites quickly subsided, and he felt a large rush of relief within seconds. He removed the glove and looked at his hand to see that not only were the termites just standing on his hand, but that their bites were fading away before his eyes.

Not wanting to disappoint his entire tribe by returning with no evidence that he'd undergone the manhood ordeal, Gazali returned home with the termite-filled mitt and performed the ritual once more. After witnessing that, Gazali's tribesmen became ecstatic. They soon put Gazali in charge of doing what ever he could manage with his mysterious new gifts to help raise money for the impoverished tribe. After recovering from a bout of unexplained migraine headaches, Gazali found that he could concoct herbal medicines with extraordinary healing properties. He started to collect many different herbs that his forefathers had ignored or abandoned as being ineffectual, and found ways to use them to cure even the most horrific diseases. (In later years, Gazali even managed to find a reliable cure for a insidious wasting sickness that the doctors from Khartoum called "HIV" or "AIDS".) Figuring out that this would make for an excellent source of income, he began to sell his herbal remedies for high prices to the people of the nearby towns and cities in an effort to raise the Muhati tribe's standard of living. Despite the threats posed to him by the Sudanese government and hostile Arabs from the north of Sudan, Gazali's new powers allowed him to evade his enemies and minister to the sick all across southern Sudan for more than five decades, and make a very healthy profit in the process.

When the Nova Age came to pass, Gazali was simultaneously intrigued and disturbed by the changes that were taking place in the world around him. While he was delighted by the results of Project Utopia's terraforming of neighboring Ethiopia, the sheer carnage of the Equatorial Wars made him fear for his tribe's survival. Despite the fact that having Project Utopia (and Team Tomorrow Central) for a neighbor intimidated the Sudanese government into reinventing itself as a "peace-loving, reformist regime", Gazali knew that all of Africa was now a powder keg waiting for the spark that would make it explode.

As of 2015, after much consultation with the other elders of the Muhati, Gazali now seeks to ally himself and the Muhati with an honorable group of outsider novas. Gazali's precognitive visions have warned him away from many of the more visible nova organizations, making him keep his distance from Project Utopia, DeVries, and the Teragen. While he seeks to ensure that the Muhati will have a future, Gazali now wonders if his tribe's future will be found in Africa, or even on Earth.

Image: Gazali is a lean African man with tight, curly black hair and brown eyes. Despite looking to be in his late 50s, he displays the energy and vigor of a much younger man. He's about 5'7" tall and looks like he weighs just over 140 lbs. Whenever he walks down the street or into a room; his very presence demands attention and demands it *now*. When living among his tribe, Gazali wears the same tribal garb that the other men of his tribe wear. When visiting the towns and cities, he wears a short-sleeved beige linen campshirt, military-surplus khaki cotton trousers, and a pair of well-worn leather sandals. In either environment, he also wears a golden headband that was given to one of his ancestors by a visiting Frenchman.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a healer in both spirit and practice. The only time that you stop nurturing and tending to the people of your tribe is when you head out to the closest towns and cities to sell your medicines. That's when you go from being a grandfatherly tribesman to being a natural salesman. Despite this, you always take pains to give your customers good value for their money. While you are good at acting the part of an ignorant jungle shaman, that's only a front for the rubes in the cities and towns. Like the rest of the Muhati, you are surprisingly well-educated and informed about the world outside the jungles of Sudan.

Gear: Leather bag of herbal remedies, appropriate clothing, gold headband.

Nature: Caregiver

Allegiance: Muhati Tribe

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Appearance 3, Manipulation 5, Charisma 5.

Abilities: Arts 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 4 (Acute Hearing), Biz 3, Brawl 2, Computer 2, Etiquette 3, Endurance 4, Instruction 5 (One-on-one), Linguistics 5 (Nilotic native, Arabic, English, French, Nubian, Ta Bedawie), Medicine 5 (First Aid, Herbalism), Meditation 5 (Ritual), Navigation 5 (Air, Land), Perform 5 (Shamanic Rituals), Rapport 5, Resistance 4, Ride 2, Science 1, Stealth 5, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 4, Survival 4 (Forage).

Backgrounds: Cipher 4, Followers 6 (the Muhati tribe, also people Gazali has cured and their families), Node 2, Resources 2.

Merits and Flaws: Common Sense (1), Taint Resistance (5).

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 9, Taint 2

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity • (Catfooted), Mega-Stamina • (Adaptability, Regeneration), Mega-Perception • (That Creepy Feeling), Mega-Intelligence • (Mental Prodigy: Medical), Mega-Appearance • (First Impression, Mr. Nobody), Mega-Manipulation •• (Persuader, The Voice), Mega-Charisma • (Commanding Presence, Perfect Guest).

Quantum Powers: Animal Mastery ••, Healing •••••, Luck •••••, Pretercognition •.

* Gazali can only use his Healing power by means of his special medicines. Instead of directly healing a wound or curing a disease, he imbues the medicine with quantum-induced healing properties. While this prevents Gazali from simply healing people with a touch, it also means that a dose of the quantum-charged medicines he sells will work even if he's not around to power the healing effect.

Beutech Services, Inc.

- **Mission Statement:** "Beutech Services is dedicated to bringing the world's loveliest women to *your* runway. If you want Beauty, think Beutech."

- **History:** For years, Natalia Graham toiled away in the shadows of the fashion industry. When Natalia erupted, she thought that everything wrong in her life would get better, and that her talents in fashion and design would finally be recognized. But that was not to be. She was hired on to DeVries working for SuperImpose. She soon became bitter, and after a yelling match with one of her co-workers, decided to part ways with the large company in order to strike out on her own.

With the considerable funds that she had accumulated, she managed to scrape together a large show to get her career started. She got together the models, the fashions and even had enough left over to hire a nova bodyguard for a "professional touch".

The show (to say the least) was a stunning success. Long after the lights went out the cast party went on, and Graham and Grey talked through the night about all the possibilities that this presented. She found that, under his gruff exterior, he actually had a keen business mind. Soon Graham took Grey on as a business partner, and began to hire more women to work the shows.

After more successes in the field, Grey brought an offer to her to make even more money. He suggested that they start an escort service for some of their more esteemed followers to begin to rely on. After some goading Graham agreed, even she couldn't deny the money making opportunities in this. She let Grey do what he wanted and went about her business.

With this newly formed side venture, the pair have amassed quite a fortune, and have been able to hire a nova model to help bring in more customers. Graham has made sure to tell Grey that Copy Novix (as she calls herself) is off limits to the customers of the escort service. Grey humored Natalia's request, but only to the point of reserving Copy Novix's escort work as a "special service" available only to Beutech's wealthiest and most discreet customers. To date, Natalia remains completely ignorant of this arrangement.

- **Membership:** Beutech's membership is very limited. A woman first has to catch and hold Natalia Graham's keen eye in order to have a shot at becoming a Beutech model. Even then, Natalia's high standards ensure that only the most attractive models are allowed into Beutech's ranks. Natalia is still looking for more female novas to work for her as Beutech models, but still refuses to her lower her standards. The business portion of Beutech currently employs two accountants, two advertising agents and a secretary; so Natalia isn't looking to hire anyone else for Beutech's lone office.

- **Activities:** Fashion is the name of the game! Beutech produces amazing fashion shows that even leave some people at SuperImpose gaping in awe. A side venture is their escort service that often allows for "all the trimmings". Occasionally one or two customers may get together to hire a few girls for a large party. (Such affairs are always supervised by Grey, and done under Graham's nose).

- **Allies and Enemies:** Some of Beutech's closest allies are some of the top politicians in the world. Beutech's escorts have helped to keep these hard-working statesmen warm on many a lonely night (away from their wives, of course). The Pandemonium faction of the Teragen is also happy to have another nova-owned company that can make their hedonistic lifestyle look good.

Other factions of the Teragen are not so keen on Beutech, though. The Harvesters see Natalia Graham as a "zip-lover", and Nova Vigilance is none too pleased with Beutech as well. Several socially-conservative religious groups have publicly voiced their opposition to Beutech on grounds that the modeling company "glorifies sex". Ironically, more than a few leaders of those religious groups have also been repeat customers of Beutech's escort service.

- **Getting Involved:** To become a Beutech model, a woman must be both extremely attractive and have a very pleasant personality. Natalia Graham will only hire the best, even when she's hunting for potential nova models. A model candidate with a less-than-pleasant personality might be able to get herself hired by Beutech if she can get Grey to vouch for her, which is never *too* hard.

Dramatis Personae Natalia Graham

Background: When she was young, Natalia loved clothes. Much to her mother's dismay she would change clothes several times a day, and would often mix and match her clothes to make different styles. It only got worse as she got older. Like any teenage girl she would complain about how she never had anything to wear, and would often beg to borrow money from her parents. One day her mother got fed up with it. "If you want new clothes," she said, "you can make them yourself!" She took Natalia to the fabric store that very day; and bought her a cheap sewing machine, some thread, needles, fabric and an assortment of buttons and other sewing hardware. That night she taught Natalia how to sew. The next day Natalia had her first inspiration and got to work.

Natalia was the talk of her high school for the rest of her time there, and was voted "Best Dressed" 3 times in a row in the school yearbook. After graduation, Natalia soon set her sights in a career in fashion, and was sure she could succeed as a baseline in a nova-dominated profession. She created her own fashion line and tried to set up a show to exhibit her work, but no one showed any interest. She was even turned down outright a few times! Natalia's first real fashion show only took place due to her repeated lying in order to get herself an audience. She waited until everyone had gathered, and then introduced herself in her first fashion. It didn't take long for the crowd to get angry. Natalia was desperate at that point...she begged people to stop...and they did. Something about her had changed slightly. People went back to their seats, and watched the fashion show.

The next day, however, their bad reviews of her one-woman fashion show crushed her. Swallowing her pride, Natalia soon took a job with DeVries, where she worked at SuperImpose in order to get by. She also began saving the money to put on another, more successful fashion show. Natalia eventually accumulated the funds she needed, quit DeVries and SuperImpose, and founded Beutech Services. The rest is history.

Image: Natalia is a 5 foot tall caucasian woman with grey eyes and bleached-blond hair. (Natalia's really a brunette.) She has all the best curves and weighs in at around 140 lbs. When in public she usually wears her own fashions, and even then will usually wear extremely revealing clothing in an attempt to grab as much attention as possible. When in the comfort of her own home, her office, or at a friend's home she will wear comfortable baggy clothes.

Roleplaying Hints: There are two sides to your personality. The first side is the professional bombshell that observes closely, flirts whenever necessary and makes sure that you get what you want. You're a sharp-minded person who only acts like a dumb bimbo to get male customers comfortable with you. When you aren't trying to impress potential customers your other side comes out, revealing a generally nice person. Your idea of a good day involves coming into Beutech's design studio and working hard on the next line of clothes to revolutionize the fashion world. There are even times where your mischievous streak will shine through, when you'll pull a prank or two on some of your friends. You make sure to stay well away from Grey's "side projects"; while you have an good idea what's going on there, you don't want to know the details. The money that Grey brings in from his operations helps keeps Beutech Services financially afloat, and you consider that more than reason enough to leave him alone.

Gear: Sketch pad, pencils, cell phone

Nature: Visionary

Allegiance: Beutech Services

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Appearance 5, Manipulation 5, Charisma 5.

Abilities: Arts 5 (Fashion Design), Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Biz 4, Bureaucracy 2, Computer 2, Drive 3, Endurance 3, Etiquette 5, Linguistics 2 (English native, French), Perform 5 (Fashion Modeling), Rapport 5, Resistance 3, Seduction 5, Streetwise 2, Style 5 (Fashion, Makeup), Subterfuge 4.

Backgrounds: Contacts 4 (throughout the fashion world), EuFiber 3, Resources 4.

Merits and Flaws: None.

Quantum 2, Quantum Pool 24, Willpower 5, Taint 2

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina • (Adaptability), Mega-Perception • (Electromagnetic Vision), Mega-Wits • (Artistic Genius, Natural Empath, Synergy), Mega-Appearance • (Seductive Looks), Mega-Manipulation • (The Voice), Mega-Charisma • (Seductive, Natural Agitator).

Quantum Powers: None.

Felicia "Copy Novix" Fernandez

Background: Ever since she was little, Felicia has always wanted to become an actress. She would dream of the life of ease that she could have, if she could only make it big in the movies! The good life she imagined was her only real refuge

from her actual miserable existence. When Felicia was little she was sold to a drug lord for food money by her parents. She was forced to work for hours on end in a sweatshop by day, and was occasionally taken advantage of at night by whichever "dorm keeper" was in charge of the run-down building that housed her and the other slave girls. This went on for years, until Felicia finally became fed up with the entire ordeal. The last time a dorm keeper tried to assault her, she stole the thug's knife and threatened to kill him. She knew she couldn't make good on her threat, so instead tried to kill herself by plunging the knife into her own heart. Felicia was surprised when she didn't die right then. When the thug pulled the knife out of her chest, the wound seemed to close by itself. She decided to push her luck and brazenly strode out of the slave quarters, ordering people out of her way. They obeyed without really knowing why, and Felicia escaped into the night. Since her escape, Felicia tried everything she could think of in order to help her attain her dream of becoming an actress. She eventually met up with Natalia Graham, and decided that she'd finally found the start of her path to stardom in the fashion shows of Beutech. Felicia does still have to put out, but considers it to be only sex. She considers herself fortunate that she's actually getting paid for it now, and that she's servicing wealthy clients instead of back-alley lowlifes. Besides, all actresses do this in their early years, right?

Image: Copy Novix is an extremely beautiful latino girl in her late teens, with rich brown eyes and waist length raven black hair. She is about 5'6" tall and weighs a little over 110 lbs. Copy's physique is extremely well-toned, which has led to her developing a preference for wearing clothing that lets her show off her body to best effect. Her sheer sex appeal is such that after getting a good look at her, most men (and more than a few women) quickly find Copy Novix taking center stage in their private fantasies, regardless of their prior tastes in women.

Roleplaying Hints: Since your eruption, you've become an accomplished flirt. You'll do whatever you need to get the attention of the right people, whether by twirling your hair around your little finger or by wearing extremely revealing clothing (or none at all). While you won't stoop to committing actual violence or killing someone, you will do whatever you need to in order to become a movie star!

Gear: Cell phone

Nature: Hedonist

Allegiance: Beutech Services

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Appearance 5, Manipulation 5, Charisma 5.

Abilities: Athletics 2, Biz 1, Drive 2, Endurance 3, Etiquette 3, Firearms 1, Linguistics 2 (Spanish native, English, French), Martial Arts 2, Perform 2, Rapport 4, Resistance 3, Style 4, Subterfuge 3,

Backgrounds: Contacts 1 (Felicia still knows the drug lord who bought her; she managed to work everything out with him and even got on his sweet side.), Resources 3.

Merits and Flaws: None.

Quantum 2, Quantum Pool 24, Willpower 7, Taint 0.

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina • (Regeneration), Mega-Appearance •• (Mirroring, First Impression, Copycat,

Seductive Looks), Mega-Manipulation •• (The Voice), Mega-Charisma •• (Seductive, Soothe).

Quantum Powers: None.

Beuchanan "The Touch" Grey

Background: Melinda Simmons thought that she had found the perfect man to be her husband. Beuchanan was a nice enough man, he was a good provider and he wasn't all that bad looking. What did it matter that he lost his temper every once in a while? It was nothing major, when everything else was so good."

Beuchanan thought that things were pretty good, too. And that's why he did his best to keep his temper in check until he got her squarely under his thumb. Beuchanan and Melinda were married on July 13, 2001. After that, everything went downhill for Melinda. Beuchanan's abusive behavior towards her was nearly constant when he was at home. When he was in a bad mood, when something didn't go his way, or even when he thought that she was getting smart with him; Beuchanan would berate and often physically abuse her. At nights before they went to sleep, no matter what Melinda said or did, Beuchanan was to be gratified. After a year of this Melinda became pregnant, and soon gave birth to their only child, a daughter they named Sally.

Things only got worse after that, because now Beuchanan had a trump card to hold over her, and he made sure to use it often. The years of abuse flew by, and Melinda finally decided that enough was enough after the first time Beuchanan laid a hand on their daughter in the middle of August 2005. Melinda made plans to flee Beuchanan with her daughter. The next day she took Sally and a packed suitcase, and opened the front door of her house. It would have been a perfect escape if Beuchanan hadn't been standing there with his keys in hand, having come home for a quickie on his lunch break. He became so enraged that he reached out, grabbed her hand and erupted...Melinda was dead in seconds from his touch.

After that, Beuchanan called Project Utopia and let them take care of his mess. Utopia's lawyers got all the charges against Beuchanan dropped, letting him off with only 1 year of probation under Utopian supervision. During that year, Utopian researchers helped Beuchanan find some degree of control over his powers, mostly by creating a pair of specially-designed gloves that insulated living things and objects from his touch. After Beuchanan had gotten everything that he wanted out of Project Utopia, he dumped them like a high-school cheerleader after the prom.

After being hired to supervise the security operations at a SuperImpose modeling show, Beuchanan met Natalia Graham and the two forged a deal. She struck out on her own, and formed Beutech. For his part, Beuchanan agreed to take care of Beutech's security needs, and to make sure that everyone pays and is paid for services rendered.

Image: Beuchanan's looks are pretty average by baseline standards. There's nothing too special about him; except for his pure white skin, freakishly large hands and shaved head. He always wears loose fitting clothing and his signature black latex gloves.

Roleplaying Hints: Right now things aren't too bad. You get laid quite a bit, and when a willing partner is unavailable, you

have your own little doll at home. Hell, she is even better than her mother in that you know she isn't going to leave you, and you even got to take her virginity! You like to act the big man and you like it even better when you can prove it. You're the classic wife beater/ trailer trash and you don't care who knows it.

Nature: Hedonist

Allegiance: Beutech Services

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Appearance 2, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Awareness 2, Biz 4, Brawl 3, Perform 1, Rapport 3, Streetwise 4, Style 2, Subterfuge 3.

Backgrounds: Contacts 2 (Security Firms, Lawyers), Eufiber 4, Node 2, Resources 4

Merits and Flaws: Dark Secret (sexually abuses daughter, -3), Debt (-3), Dependant: Sally, daughter (-4), Eufiber Attuned (3), Lusty (-1), Quantum Recovery (1), Sexy (1).

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 5, Taint 6 (Large Hands, White Skin, Permanent Power (random)*)

Mega-Attributes: None.

Quantum Powers: Armor ••, Claws (Aggravated) ••, Disorient •• (Touch, Extra Duration), Disrupt •• (Touch, Extra Duration), Empathic Manipulation •• (Touch, Extra Duration), Immobilize •• (Touch, Extra Duration).

* Permanent Power (random). For this you count all of Grey's touch powers (5 in his case) and roll to see what power is active at a given encounter (roll a d10, and divide by 2. That is the number you will use for which power).

Story Hooks

- **Damsel In Distress:** One of the player characters has a female relative, former lover or close friend who is offered a modeling position at Beutech Services. The woman contacts the player character a few weeks later, and claims that she has been coerced into becoming a prostitute by one of the novae (Beuchanan Grey) who helps run Beutech. She begs the player character to help her escape from Beutech, as she honestly fears for her life if any of the Beutech novae catch her trying to run out on her contract.

- **Going Undercover:** The player characters are contacted by a higher-up in their organization who wants them to investigate some strange activities that Beutech Services seems to be involved with. So far, others in their organization haven't been able to get any reliable information (or warrants to search Beutech's premises, in the case of the Directive or other law enforcement agencies), and it doesn't seem like they will be able to in the near future. The player characters are ordered to perform a covert investigation of Beutech Services, most likely by infiltrating Beutech either as models or as customers of their escort service. If they should be discovered and/or caught by Beutech in the course of the investigation they're on their own, as their organization will deny any knowledge of their activities.

- **A Moral Quandary:** One or more of the player characters want to have a night out on the town and is tipped off by a friend to the "adult entertainment" offered by Beutech Services. When talking to Beuchanan Grey, the player characters get an odd impression from him, as the man somehow seems "off". This is exacerbated when Grey's daughter walks in

on their conversation, with the physical and behavioral signs of being abused plain for any Mega-Perceptive or empathic characters to notice. Do the player characters look into the matter and try to save the girl from her abusive father, or will they ignore her plight in favor of indulging themselves in debauchery?

- **Scandal!:** An important leader of an organization, preferably a political or religious group that trumpets “old-fashioned moral values” as part of their platform, is caught on video while patronizing Beutech’s escort service by a lucky paparazzi. If this story gets out, the career of the leader in question could easily be ruined and the organization he or she belongs to could lose their credibility in the eyes of the public. The player characters could work for the endangered organization, and attempt to bury the evidence (and maybe the paparazzi as well) before it’s released to the media. Alternatively, the player characters could work for a group that’s hostile to the endangered organization, and attempt to ensure that the scandal receives as much media coverage as possible.

The Islington Tea Society

The Islington Tea Society is a group of Mega-Social novas who are also expert brainwashers. Mercenary, amoral and with few discernable scruples, they pursue their trade for three reasons: love of their art, the obscenely large profits to be had, and for the sheer fun of working other people’s minds like so much clay. They’ll do just about anything for anyone, except Project Utopia, which is the one group that they despise. They are a tightly-knit group of close friends who are also devout practitioners of the art of holding British tea parties, which happens to be the public face of this group. As of 2015, no one has tumbled to the fact that this seemingly harmless and useless group of wealthy upper-crust British eccentrics is actually a covert brainwasher’s club. They could teach both the Directive and Project Proteus many things about operating undercover. Since they operate through several layers of agents and dummy corporations, the Islington Tea Society has sometimes found themselves hired to undo their own brainwashing work. When that happens they just grin, perform the work, and pocket the profits.

The Islington Tea Society was originally formed by the British Security Services (MI5) as a cover organization back in the 1950s, during the Cold War. Their founder, Albert Wellington, was a legitimate blueblood who had inherited a large manor in Islington looking out over the ocean. “Rebuilding the manor for Tea Society meetings and activities” was the official cover story given for most of the subterranean excavations, pier construction, and other odd activities that were going on. In reality the manor became a way station for spies, a training facility, a smuggling center, a monitoring station and a clearing house for British espionage operations in general. For decades the Islington Tea Society was something of an in-joke among the spies. After reading about the Islington Tea Society in the papers, several other aristocrats insisted on joining, and Albert found himself the head of a clueless group of old money

bluebloods as well as a station keeper for “Her Majesty’s Spy Central”.

Albert’s son Steven grew up at the manor, and was trained there after following in his father’s footsteps and joining MI-5. Eventually Steven took over the operations of the Islington Tea Society when his ailing father retired in 1965. During the next three decades, Steven proved himself to be an even more accomplished spymaster than his father, which only increased the value of both Steven and the Islington Tea Society in the eyes of MI-5. Then the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Cold War was over. Budget cuts forced the closure of the covert part of the manor and, in theory, all of the MI-5 personnel that had been posted there either retired or were transferred to other facilities. Steven himself retired from MI-5 with full honors, and was thanked profusely by his superiors for his thirty years of service to the Crown. All of that praise rang hollow to Steven, as the prospect being reduced to holding tea parties for aristocratic dolts for the rest of his life was a bitter blow for the former spymaster.

Several years of operating the Islington Tea Society without government subsidies (i.e. rent) nearly forced Steven to file for bankruptcy. On March 23, 1998, his sheer frustration over his situation caused him to erupt. With the expansion of Steven’s intellect came the realization that he could remake the Islington Tea Society into a viable and profitable operation all by himself. Steven decided to conceal his eruption and go into private “practice” instead. The Cold War might have become history, but there was still a market for competent brainwashers, and Steven was one of the best. Assembling a group of skilled operatives with sufficiently flexible ethics wasn’t a problem, as Steven still had contacts within the intelligence community from his days as a spymaster. Over time, other novas have been pulled into the ranks of the Islington Tea Society, while the baseline members have been subtly pushed out. As far as the world knows, a few years ago Steven handed over the family business to his son Roger, retired as President of the Society, and died of heart failure like his father before him. In reality “Roger” is just a young version of Steven.

- **Goals:** Have as much fun as possible, and enjoy the Good Life. Make obscenely large amounts of money. Throw magnificent tea parties. And above all else, don’t get caught.

- **Allies:** The Society has been unknowingly hired by various groups to “adjust” or “convince” various people. Said groups include MI5, MI6, the Directive, Project Proteus, various elements of the Teragen, various criminal gangs, and more than a few Fortune 500 businesses. As of 2015, the Casablanca faction of the Teragen has come closest to discovering the truth about the Islington Tea Society, but the Teragen are also the group that would care the least about the Society’s activities. If the Islington Tea Society’s covert activities were ever publicly exposed, the Teragen would become the only group that might openly ally themselves with the Society.

- **Enemies:** If the covert side of the Islington Tea Society were ever publicly revealed, most of their former clients (save for the Teragen) would be sure to turn against the Society. Also, Project Utopia would take an especially dim view of the Society’s activities, and would certainly seek to shut the Society down once and for all. The victims of the Society’s brainwashing

might also want to take revenge against the Society, as could their relatives and friends.

- **Methods and Operations:** Given a target, Isabel researches whatever information on him or her that's available electronically. If she thinks it is worth the Society's time, Elizabeth will then perform a surreptitious telepathic probe of the target's mind. Depending on how far the Society is willing to go in a given situation, it might all end there. In most cases, targets that are being brainwashed for profit will have their memories altered by Elizabeth, so that whatever project their client is backing will seem like a good idea to the target. Occasionally Roger will help Elizabeth out and give a credulous target a very convincing "vision". In extreme cases Roger will either Dominate the target and/or Victor will knock him out, leaving Isabel to transport the target back to the Society's base for a few days. Often Elizabeth (through impersonation) or Isabel (electronically) will establish convincing evidence as to why the target has suddenly gone missing. At that point the target is basically doomed. Isabel's Disorient power can drastically reduce someone's Willpower and/or defenses against brainwashing, as can the various drugs used by Victor. When used in combination with high levels of Mega-Manipulation, Telepathy, and Domination; the Society can rebuild pretty near any baseline's personality in a matter of hours, or at worst a few days.

In general, the Society has two rules of exclusion that they follow pretty well. First, do nothing obvious close to home. Second, do not deal with nova targets, or targets that are even suspected of being novas. The problem in dealing with nova targets is the level of danger increases dramatically; the danger that the brainwashing won't take, the danger that the nova will accidentally put his hand through someone's chest, and the danger that even if everything goes off without a hitch, other telepaths might get involved and bring the Society's fun and games to a screeching halt. This isn't to say that they always follow those rules, though. Local people who deal with the Society are often altered in minimal ways to prevent them from taking any notice of the Society's covert operations or to remove any memories of said operations. Occasionally this will be done simply to make things more convenient for the Society. Novas are rarely subjected to the Society's alterations; but when the fee is huge, the risk slight, and the cut outs between the Society and their client numerous, it does happen. Even then, the actual brainwashing will be performed from a great distance by means of Elizabeth's telepathic powers.

- **Membership:** As of 2015, Roger and his three colleagues are all there is to the hidden "brainwasher's club" segment of the Islington Tea Society. They're also members of the cover organization, which currently has another 30 utterly clueless bluebloods as registered members.

- **Activities:** The Society currently accepts brainwashing jobs from groups such as MI5, MI6, the Directive, Project Proteus, various elements of the Teragen, various criminal gangs, and several Fortune 500 businesses. All of these groups believe they are dealing with various middle men or brokers who are applying unethical leverage (i.e. blackmail, political influence, or bribes) to the target they want taken care of, but mostly they just don't care to know the sordid details. Note that the head

officers of a Fortune 500 company or the Directive have no idea that they are dealing with a group of nova brainwashers, but down the line of delegation and outsourcing they eventually tend to lose sight of what is happening in the field. Partly this is a result of circumstance; modern companies are required by law to follow the law. U.S. companies in particular are prevented from paying bribes...even in counties where you have to pay bribes to get anything done. The end result of this was both "cleaner government" and the birth of "middle men" or "brokers" who get things done on a local level without the main company knowing how.

The Society has created dozens of electronic identities which appear to be highly placed and reclusive local people, who are rumored to have an "in" with the local government. When someone approaches one of these fictional people needing an introduction or needing someone to push their plan forward, the Society members will discuss the job they're being asked to perform. If the Society accepts the job, they will quote a price for the client to pay beforehand. Once the payment is made to one of the Society's many secret Swiss bank accounts, the Society will alter the target's mind so that he believes "Project X is very important because it will result in personal profit for myself / continued stability / etc.". And the project to build a pipeline, store, air force base, or what-have-you will go forwards without any further interference from the target. This is how the Society pays the bills. They also have "brainwashing for the fun of it" parties where they alter someone just to see if they can pull it off. Sometimes the results are good, sometimes they're bad, sometimes it's subtle, and sometimes it's public and "amusing". Examples: A member of the Church of Michael Archangel "realizes" that his children are secretly novas, or just that novas are actually angels. A veteran fire chief suddenly develops pyromaniacal tendencies. A cheating husband who runs off with another woman "realizes" that he's still in love with his wife, while the wife "realizes" that she's actually in love with her husband's lover. A 65 year old staunch anti-communist is given a "new life" as a 25 year old communist activist. The Society members pride themselves on coming up with new twists on a situation, so that they can turn the drama of their victims' everyday lives into live-action situation comedy.

Dramatis Personae

Roger Wellington (aka Steven Wellington)

Background: Roger Wellington's background can be found in the Islington Tea Society overview.

Image: Roger appears to be a Caucasian man in his mid-20s; 5'11" tall with brown hair and eyes. He's healthy, well dressed, almost but not quite handsome, and perhaps operating just a little out of his depth. He might be one of thousands of small businessmen everywhere.

Roleplaying Hints: To the casual observer, everything about you screams "easy mark with old money connections". You are obviously outshone by your wife, and it's apparently obvious that yours is a marriage that will last as just as long as your money and her looks does. Behind the façade of your slightly bumbling manner is a nova who truly enjoys breaking down and then rebuilding other people's minds, souls, and

sometimes even their bodies. You can leave someone older, younger, saner, insane, and believing anything you want them to believe.

Gear: Tailored suit, Walther PPK pistol w/ Brausch silencer.

Nature: Architect

Allegiance: Islington Tea Society.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 5, Appearance 4, Manipulation 5, Charisma 4.

Abilities: Academics 1, Arts 1, Athletics 3, Awareness 3, Biz 2, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 2, Carousing 4 (British tea parties), Command 2, Computer 1, Demolitions 2, Disguise 2, Drive 3, Endurance 3, Etiquette 4, Firearms 4, Gambling 1, Hypnosis 2, Instruction 2, Interrogation 4, Intimidation 3, Intrusion 4, Investigation 3, Legerdemain 3, Linguistics 1 (English native, Russian), Martial Arts 2, Medicine 1, Melee 2, Perform 3, Rapport 4, Resistance 3, Science 1, Seduction 3, Subterfuge 5, Survival 2, Stealth 4, Streetwise 2, Style 3, Tactics 2, Tradecraft 5.

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Cipher 5, Contacts 2 (old friends in MI-5 and MI-6), Dormancy 1, Influence 1 (as head of the Islington Tea Society), Resources 4.

Merits and Flaws: Dark Secret (member of a brainwashing club, -3).

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 8, Taint 2

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity • (Physical Prodigy), Mega-Stamina • (Regeneration), Mega-Perception ••• (Electromagnetic Vision, Hyperenhanced Hearing), Mega-Intelligence ••• (Analyze Weakness, Mental Prodigy: Financial, Mental Prodigy: Tactical), Mega-Manipulation •••• (Persuader, Trickster, The Voice).

Quantum Powers: Domination ••*, Intuition ••, Mirage ••*, Psychic Shield ••, Temporal Manipulation ••• (Internal Clock, Accelerate Time, Age Alteration, Stop Time).

* Roger's Domination and Mirage powers only function when Elizabeth is both nearby (within 3 meters of him) and her Psychic Link with him is active. Use of the Quantum Attunement enhancement would show that these powers share both Roger's and Elizabeth's quantum signatures, making Elizabeth just as immune to their effects as is Roger.

Elizabeth Wellington (aka Tatiana Stepanovna Oistrakh)

Background: Elizabeth and Roger have a history. Back in the days of the Cold War, she was Tatiana Stepanovna Oistrakh, an agent of the KGB who had achieved an admirable record of service before being selected for an operation that sought to infiltrate MI-5. By any measure, that operation turned out to be a disaster. In an effort to escape from an MI-5 agent by the name of Steven Wellington, Tatiana tried to kill him. Instead Tatiana was captured and interrogated by MI-5, and later underwent brainwashing in an effort to make her defect. The brainwashing didn't take, and Tatiana somehow managed to escape. Eventually she ended up back in Russia, where she was dismissed from active duty and reduced to working as a personal secretary for a rather loathsome (and lecherous) KGB department head. This was remarkably lenient on the part of her superiors, as those agents who had been in charge of the doomed operation were all executed.

Before the Cold War ended, Tatiana managed to escape to England, where she looked up Steven to see if he might have a job for her. For a while she taught British spies about the KGB at the Islington Tea Society, but was let go with most of the other personnel after the Cold War ended. Tatiana survived for a few years by teaching Russian language courses to British college students, and contemplated how dismal her old age had become. That all changed the day Steven Wellington showed up at her tiny apartment. After demonstrating his newly-acquired nova abilities to her, Steven made Tatiana a very attractive offer. Not one to let a golden opportunity pass her by, Tatiana agreed to fake her death and join Steven's new organization. In exchange, Steven literally gave her back her youth, along with a new identity as "Elizabeth Brookings". Soon afterwards the pair became lovers, leading to Elizabeth erupting when they were in bed together. Perhaps because of their closeness during her eruption, the two have some abilities they can only access through a "mental gestalt". She links his mind to a subject and he does the mental "weaving". Their wedding was the social event of the season in the circles of England's bluebloods. Elizabeth and Roger don't have a marriage so much as a contest. They are constantly manipulating each other, outdoing each other, etc. Generally speaking, her telepathy and Mega-Charisma are an even match for his Mega-Intelligence and Mega-Manipulation. The game continues.

Image: Elizabeth typically appears to be a stunningly beautiful Caucasian woman in her early 20s; 5'7" tall with an elegant build, fascinating green eyes and bleached blonde hair. Men stare at her because she's a medically augmented sex goddess, women because she's a fashion goddess. Although she's a nice person, it's fairly obvious that Elizabeth barely has two brain cells to rub together, which makes her even more interesting in a "when will the train crash?" sort of way.

Roleplaying Hints: In person you come off as a bleached blonde airhead sex goddess and trophy wife, and one that's just barely old enough to drink legally, to boot. That's just a convenient façade, however. Behind your seemingly empty green eyes is the mind of a 70 year old woman with decades of experience in spying and manipulating men, women, and even governments. Although your native language is Russian, you speak English with a British accent. With the drop of a fork you can suddenly draw all the attention in the room, leaving your partners free to do their dirty work. When you're impersonating someone with Copycat, you normally also use Trickster to help you play the role and/or Center of Attention to make sure that everyone notices what you want them to.

Gear: Tailored evening wear, Makarov PMM 9x18 pistol.

Nature: Somewhere between Conniver and Thrillseeker

Allegiance: Islington Tea Society.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Appearance 5, Manipulation 4, Charisma 5.

Abilities: Academics 3, Archery 1, Arts 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 4, Biz 1, Brawl 1, Bureaucracy 3, Carousing 3, Command 2, Computer 2, Disguise 3, Drive 2, Endurance 3, Etiquette 5, Firearms 4, Instruction 4, Interrogation 4, Intimidation 4, Intrusion 4, Investigation 3, Legerdemain 2, Linguistics 3 (Russian native, English, French, German), Martial

Arts 2, Medicine 2, Melee 2, Perform 4, Rapport 4, Resistance 3, Ride 2, Science 1, Seduction 4, Subterfuge 4, Survival 3, Stealth 4, Streetwise 1, Style 4, Tactics 2, Tradecraft 4.

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Cipher 5, Dormancy 1, Eufiber 2, Resources 3.

Merits and Flaws: Sexy (1), Dark Secret (member of a brainwashing club, -3).

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 8, Taint 1.

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina • (Durability, Regeneration), Mega-Perception •••• (That Creepy Feeling), Mega-Appearance •• (Copycat, Mirroring), Mega-Manipulation •• (Trickster), Mega-Charisma •••• (Center of Attention, Commanding Presence, Natural Agitator, Soothe).

Quantum Powers: Empathic Manipulation •••, Mental Blast ••• (Burning), Psychic Link ••• (to Roger), Psychic Shield ••••, Telepathy •• (Channelling), Telepathy •••• (Surreptitious).

Dr. Victor Stonehouse (aka Nick "Ghost" Rogers)

Background: Nick Rogers was a 60 year old medical researcher for a small and little-known pharmaceutical company, who erupted while gassing some of his experimental rodents. Once the post-eruption headache passed, Nick found that he could transform his body into air. With a little experimentation he found that he could also absorb the aromatic particles his body gave off (leaving him with no scent) and generate poisons (usually various types of poison gas). He also became very slippery in his social interactions as well, as talking to him was now like trying to wrestle smoke. After mastering his quantum abilities, Nick abandoned his research post to pursue a career as a Janissaries elite. He came to the Islington Tea Society's attention (and *vice versa*) when they hired him to kidnap someone. He carried out his mission so well that they hired him again on two other separate occasions.

After nearly being killed while carrying out a hostile extraction mission in Beirut, Nick felt that the elite lifestyle was getting too dangerous for his comfort, and decided that it was time for him to retire. Unfortunately he was still under contract with the Janissaries, and couldn't just walk away from them as he did with his previous job. Everything fell into place when his final mission for the Janissaries took him to Antananarivo, Madagascar; where Nick found himself in mortal combat with Tötentanz. Nick barely survived the encounter by faking his own death, and then sneaked out of the country in gaseous form by means of Antananarivo's sewer system. Now considered to be legally deceased, Nick is listed as Tötentanz's 34th nova victim. Finally free from his contract, Nick hooked up with the Islington Tea Society. They helped him to reinvent himself as "Dr. Victor Stonehouse", and Victor's been a staunch member of the Islington Tea Society ever since that day.

Victor's duties as a member of the Islington Tea Society are varied. He's their resident medical doctor, which often comes through in his brainwashing sessions as his interrogations will often have a medical theme to them. In his own words, he enjoys "rattling people's cages and then watching them run". One of his favorite tactics is to use Creeping Paranoia with medical inquiries such as "How are you feeling?". Victor also handles hostile extraction for targets within the United Kingdom.

With his powers Victor can easily enter any building that isn't airtight and knock his target unconscious. Victor will then transform the target into gaseous form like himself, and take him or her back to their base for extensive brainwashing. This tactic has resulted in several "locked room mystery" cases that still have investigators at New Scotland Yard baffled.

Image: Victor appears to be a Caucasian man in his mid-30s; 6'2" tall, of medium build, with pale grey eyes, short-cropped brown hair that's just beginning to thin out at the top and a neatly-trimmed goatee beard. Victor also habitually wears eyeglasses (a holdover from his pre-eruption years), even though he has perfect 20-20 vision. As he typically shapes his eufiber into well-tailored three-piece suits, often with a medical doctor's white linen coat, Victor is the very image of the "distinguished doctor".

Roleplaying Hints: The very model of the highly intelligent, high society doctor, you are fond of giving cryptic comments and/or criticisms which eventually turn out to be true. You very much enjoy "people watching"...especially those people who have been made more amusing by having their flaws expanded upon, removed, or just changed. You also enjoy working with and matching wits with the other Society members, as they are the only ones who can truly appreciate your criticisms of the people out there in the world.

Gear: Three-piece suit, white lab coat, doctor's bag, medical license.

Nature: Cynic

Allegiance: Islington Tea Society.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Appearance 3, Manipulation 5, Charisma 4.

Abilities: Academics 4, Animal Training 1 (Rodents), Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 2, Carousing 2, Computer 2, Drive 2, Endurance 3, Firearms 3, Instruction 2, Investigation 2, Linguistics 1 (English native, Latin), Martial Arts 3, Medicine 5, Melee 2, Might 1, Navigation 2, Resistance 3, Science 4, Style 4, Survival 1, Tradecraft 2, Weave 2.

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Attunement 5, Cipher 5, Dormancy 1, Eufiber 2, Node 2, Resources 3.

Merits and Flaws: Odorless (4), Voyeur (-2), Dark Secret (member of a brainwashing club, -3).

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 8, Taint 2.

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength • (Precision), Mega-Dexterity • (Catfooted), Mega-Stamina • (Adaptability), Mega-Perception • (Analytic Taste/Touch, Blindfighting, Bloodhound), Mega-Intelligence •• (Mental Prodigy: Medical), Mega-Manipulation ••• (Conflicting Accounts, Creeping Paranoia).

Quantum Powers: Bodymorph: Air ••••• (Density Decrease x3, 1 dot of Invisibility to sight, 1 dot of Force Field), Healing ••, Intuition ••, Poison •••• (Projectile).

Isabel Huntington

(aka Eunice Mathers, née Wordsworth)

Background: Isabel joined the Islington Tea Society in 1965, and was an active member for 12 years. Specifically, she was a member of the clueless cover group of bluebloods. In the beginning she was Eunice Wordsworth, a precocious 10 year old girl in the process of learning to be a lady, while her big brother

was 25 years old and in the process of learning to be a spy in the service of the Crown. Even spies sometimes forget to keep up their guard around children, as over the years Eunice gradually got the impression that there was another, hidden level to the Islington Tea Society. However she was neither interested nor smart enough to see any deeper into the Society's hidden side. In 1977, Eunice got married to a rich American by the name of Daniel Mathers, and moved with him to the United States. Daniel held a management position in a Silicon Valley computer chip design firm, where he would routinely put in 80-hour work weeks. Eunice assumed the role of the patient housewife, even though instances of martial intimacy with Daniel were infrequent at best.

After 28 years of the married life, and staying home alone for much of that time, Eunice erupted with powers that let her understand her husband and his work better. She developed enhanced intelligence to understand what those computer thingies were all about, and cyberkinetic abilities so that she would be able to work with him. Daniel and his company were overjoyed to have a cyberkinetic nova working with them. Eunice, on the other hand, quickly discovered she didn't have a marriage. Daniel was bisexual and had been secretly having extramarital affairs with men (whom he preferred) from the beginning. Eunice was just a showpiece that Daniel used as camouflage, so that he could stay in the closet. Eunice's entire married life was a twisted lie. If Eunice hadn't already become a nova, she would have erupted from the sheer rage and shame of it all. But she was a nova now, and although she wanted Daniel dead, she didn't want to go to jail. Looking back on her life, it became obvious to Eunice that her now deceased elder brother had been a part of something shady. Coupled with her newfound intellectual abilities and quantum powers, this realization allowed Eunice to uncover the truth about the Islington Tea Society, both in its past and present incarnations.

Planning her next move came easily to Eunice. Using her ability to physically travel through communications networks, Eunice arrived during one of the Islington Tea Society's private meetings. Once there Eunice presented herself to Roger Wellington and his nova colleagues, demonstrated their lack of data security, and offered herself for membership; with the condition that they would help her deal with her husband once and for all. Daniel Mathers died in a drunken car accident a week later. Four months after her husband died, Eunice faked her own death and resurfaced in England as "Isabel Huntington". Ever since then, electronic information about the Islington Tea Society has tended to disappear inexplicably. Thanks to Roger Wellington, Isabel is now physically 21 years old, as her married life has been erased in more ways than one. She currently helps the Islington Tea Society find the inner truth of people, although she's also capable of providing special transportation for them as well.

Image: Isabel appears to be a pretty Caucasian woman in her early 20s; and is 5'10" tall. She tends to blend into the background, i.e. a wallflower. Both her hair and eyes are light brown, and Isabel resembles Roger to the point that she could almost be his younger sister (they're actually distant cousins).

Roleplaying Hints: An introvert even before your joke of a marriage, you are turned off on men and "relationships" for the

moment. You explore people through their electronic traces, and like your ex-husband, most people are different than they would have you think. Everyone wears masks, and before you go back to the dating scene you intend to study the masks that people wear for a long time. Although you are compelled to be a part of the Society's social gatherings, you are also aloof from them and are a wallflower by choice. Given a choice, you greatly prefer to lurk in the background.

Gear: PDA which is actually a disguised top of the line wireless laptop.

Nature: Somewhere between Analyst and Explorer.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Appearance 3, Manipulation 5, Charisma 4.

Abilities: Awareness 4, Carousing 2, Computers 5, Drive 2, Endurance 3, Etiquette 3, Gambling 2 (On-line), Intrusion 3 (Hacking), Investigation 5, Perform 1, Rapport 1, Resistance 3, Style 3, Subterfuge 2, Tradecraft 1.

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Attunement 5, Cipher 5, Dormancy 1, Eufiber 2, Node 2, Resources 3.

Merits and Flaws: Concentration (1), Dark Secret (member of a brainwashing club, -3), Internal Compass (1), Quick-Witted (1, Isabel gets a +1 bonus to her Initiative score).

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 8, Taint 1.

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina • (Adaptability), Mega-Perception ••• (Holographic Awareness), Mega-Intelligence ••• (Eidetic Memory, Mental Prodigy: Investigative), Mega-Manipulation •• (Persuader).

Quantum Powers: Cyberkinesis ••••• (Alter Data, Control, Fool, Opening, Reprogram), Disorient •••, Information Manipulation •• (Disinformation, Information Void), Transmit ••••• (communications networks).

Story Hooks

• **Corruption Exposed?:** An organization that one or more of the player characters are associated with (preferably a corporation or governmental agency such as the Directive) has been waging a bidding war with a rival organization over a very lucrative contract. By all accounts, the player characters' organization had all but won the contract; all of the required permits had been signed, all of the right locals had been "brought on board", and so on. Inexplicably, the official in charge of awarding the contract changes his mind at the last minute, and awards the contract to the rival organization instead! The player characters are appointed by the superiors of their organization to investigate the matter. If they can find hard evidence that the official had been bribed or put under "undue influence" from the rival organization, then their superiors could take the rival organization to court. But when the Islington Tea Society gets wind of the player characters' investigation into their handiwork, matters start becoming complicated...

• **Vanished!:** An unfortunate person has disappeared under circumstances which appear very suspicious to one of the victim's relatives. For instance, an Op-mail sent by the victim doesn't even mention the long-scheduled appointment that the victim missed. Of course, the victim has been kidnapped and brainwashed by the Islington Tea Society. If the victim accidentally dies during a brainwashing session, the corpse would be wired to a ship anchor and sent to the bottom of the

North Sea. Alternatively, the victim could reappear somewhere in relatively good health but with a completely different personality. Depending on the Storyteller's wishes, this situation can go in several different directions. The player characters could be investigators hired by the victim's relative, or concerned friends of either the victim or the relative. One of the player characters could be the suspicious relative, or even the victim!

- **"Dirty Deeds Done For Very Healthy Fees":** One or more of the player characters needs to have someone obstinate convinced of something, or to have an introduction made. A colleague recommends a "friend I know from the OpNet, who has been useful to me in this sort of situation in the past".

- **A Perilous Invitation:** One of the player characters (or one of that player character's close friends) is a well-bred descendant of an established family from England's upper classes: i.e. a "blueblood". As such, the player character receives an invitation to one of the Islington Tea Society's much-lauded tea parties. Is this simply a coincidence, or does Roger Wellington & Co. have an interest in the player character? And if so, are they interested in the player character as a candidate for brainwashing, or as a potential new recruit?

The Koltsov Academy

To most novas, China hasn't been the most welcoming of countries to visit, and the prospect of living there is considered more trouble than it's worth. The government is corrupt, the environment is heavily polluted, and the Heaven Thunder Triad has its claws into everything. Faced with the prospect of either being drafted into the Heavenly Exploding Mandate or being vivisected in a Heaven Thunder Triad nova-rendering factory, China has become something of a "no man's land" for novas. Faced with both official hostility and monumental corruption, even Project Utopia has mostly left China to its own devices. But there's something new growing in China. Almost as if catalyzed by the rampant corruption and suffering; a steadily increasing number of people in China have been dreaming of revolution, peaceful prosperity, and a life without the threat of the Triads. Guided by their uncannily accurate dreams, the seeds of a new China have been sown.

And while there is a nova presence behind all of this conspiracy, it's not what most fearful baselines would expect. It's not a megalomaniacal would-be nova dictator, nor is it a nova cult. It isn't part of some plot for world domination hatched by Project Utopia, the Teragen, or by DeVries. What stands behind the growing revolutionary movement is the Koltsov Academy.

At its heart, the Koltsov Academy is a school for training young novas, and has also grown into a full-fledged community of novas and their families. If they became publicly known, the Academy would surely be subverted or destroyed by most of the various nova factions and/or major governments, with the People's Republic of China and the Heaven Thunder Triad posing the most immediate threats. So the Academy has lived and operated strictly behind the scenes for over a decade as of 2015. Guided by the precognitive visions of Grandfather Monkey, the Academy seeks to make China a place where both

baselines and novas can live civilized, peaceful, and prosperous lives. And it does this mainly through a very under-appreciated tactic: education.

- **Goals:** The primary goal of the Koltsov Academy novas has always been to ensure the survival of both themselves and their baseline relatives. This is why they recruit and educate latent novas, so that their hidden community can grow in a healthy manner. This is why they are so secretive, so that they can live free of the yoke of the various nova factions and powerful baseline governments and corporations. It is why they have been quietly fomenting a revolution in China; with which the Academy hopes to topple the current Maoist regime and transform China into a more civilized, peaceful and safer nation for people to live in. Finally, this is why they have been working to end the threat posed by the Heaven Thunder Triad once and for all.

- **Allies:** Despite their near-compulsive secrecy, the Koltsov Academy does have friends in both high and low places. Ludmilla Zhdanov has literally thousands of baseline followers throughout China; all of whom she has covertly educated by her mechanically-augmented telepathic powers. Some of them hold important positions in the People's Liberation Army, the Chinese Communist Party, and other segments of the Chinese government. Others command "sleeping cells" of revolutionaries scattered throughout the Chinese countryside. Ludmilla has also taken pains to recruit many of China's leading intellectuals to the cause of revolution and reform in China. To ensure that these revolutionary and dissident cells won't die with their leaders, Ludmilla telepathically teaches her followers how to be teachers themselves. Ludmilla and Grandfather Monkey have also managed to befriend Sophia Rousseau and Maxwell Anderson Mercer, and are presently trying to set up a dialogue between the two faction leaders. Both of the Academy's leaders know that they will need the aid of powerful allies to survive the upcoming conflict, and only the Aberrants and Mercer's faction of the Aeon Society appear to be both worthwhile and trustworthy.

- **Enemies:** If the Academy's existence were ever to be publicly revealed, the current government of China would correctly see the Academy as a threat to their rule, and act against them. Whether the Maoist regime would be able to strike effectively at the Academy is anyone's guess, given how thoroughly it has been infiltrated by the Academy's baseline agents. The Heaven Thunder Triad would become the Academy's other great foe, as the Academy has been interfering with their production of nova-derived drugs for quite some time. As far as the other factions are concerned, the Directive and Project Proteus would be the most likely groups to take action against the Koltsov Academy. The prevention of nova conspiracies to topple a major government is one of the main reasons the Directive was created, and they wouldn't see the fact that the particular government the Academy seeks to overthrow is corrupt to the point of terminal decay as being relevant. Project Proteus would consider the idea of a hidden community of novas who have actually begun to breed nova children one of the greatest threats possible to their plans for humanity's future. Director Thetis would quickly make the elimination of the Academy one of Proteus' top priorities. If the

Academy does succeed in bringing down the Heaven Thunder Triad for good, then either the Nakato Gumi yakuza or the Camparelli-Zhukov Megasyndicate would be sure to attempt to move in on the HTT's former territory. Without a strong, uncorrupted Chinese government to keep these foreign organized crime groups at bay; the Academy would find itself having to fight against them as well.

- **Methods and Operations:** The Koltsov Academy locates potential recruits throughout Asia by means of the precognitive visions of Grandfather Monkey. An assessment of the potential recruit's psychology is then made through covert telepathic contact. If the candidate is judged acceptable (the Academy shies away from potential sociopaths, megalomaniacs and other problem personalities), then Academy agents will attempt to recruit him or her. Aside from skilled professionals that have been harassed by the Triads, the Academy also watches for any latent novas that Grandfather Monkey detects in his visions. (Almost all latent nova recruits agree to join the Academy once they've been informed about the threat posed to them by the Heaven Thunder Triad, so the ranks of the Academy have grown considerably over the years.) Once a recruit agrees to join the Academy, the death of the recruit (and possibly his or her immediate family) will be faked for the authorities. This is done by creating an unliving duplicate of the recruit's body (along with duplicates of anyone else required) at a phony murder scene, which allows the Academy to pin the recruit's apparent demise on whichever of the Triads is most handy. The recruit and any family members are then whisked away to the Academy's hidden community, usually via Silence's teleportation powers.

Ludmilla Zhdanov acts as the headmistress of the Academy proper, overseeing her teachers in what has become one of the premiere educational centers on the planet. She oversees her network of revolutionaries and dissidents via telepathic contact, which she usually manifests to her baseline followers as dream-messages from their ancestors. This unorthodox form of communication makes it nearly impossible for the PRC to even notice that there's a revolution building against them, much less act effectively against it. An ironic bonus of this tactic is that there is no apparent nova involvement with the new revolution, even in the eyes of the revolutionaries themselves. Even in 2015, many Chinese still hold to the old beliefs of ancestor-worship, and take to the notion of their efforts being guided and aided by their ancestors with startling ease.

Grandfather Monkey acts as the unofficial mayor of the Academy's hidden community, and leads the Academy's militia with Silence as his second-in-command. Every resident of the community is trained to fight in one way or another, even if it's just learning some basic martial arts and becoming a decent shot with a pistol or semi-automatic rifle. Grandfather Monkey also oversees the underground farms and supply houses for the community, and handles any civil disputes that arise. Finally, as co-leader of the Koltsov Academy, Grandfather Monkey is permitted to talk some sense into Ludmilla whenever he feels that she's making a mistake or otherwise screwing up. Of course, that means Ludmilla is allowed to do the same to him, too...

Martin Zhang oversees the Academy's data-storage vaults, and also manufactures many specialized substances and materials to be used by the community with his powers. Aside from creating high-quality medical supplies and pharmaceuticals (including the Academy's improved version of the "brain burn" drug), Martin is responsible for creating the "corpses" used by the Academy to fake the deaths of new recruits. He is also the Academy's top computer maintenance expert.

Mallory is the Academy's resident inventor, and is responsible for creation and subsequent upkeep of the Psychotronic Resonator. This quantum device exponentially increases the range of a nova operator's Telepathy, although it takes about two weeks' worth of practice for a new operator to become proficient with the Psychotronic Resonator. In 2015, only Ludmilla and Grandfather Monkey have been trained to use the Psychotronic Resonator. When Ludmilla is using it, the Psychotronic Resonator can increase the range of her Telepathy to cover the entire nation of China. Unfortunately the device requires extensive recalibration and retooling between uses, requiring Mallory to work on it for five days straight before the Psychotronic Resonator can be used again. Currently, Mallory is working on a way to extend the Psychotronic Resonator's range even further, perhaps to a global range. To hear Mallory tell it, he's close to a breakthrough that will let him do just that.

The Academy does not tolerate attempts to investigate them or to interfere with their plans. Any such attempts will be dealt with as decisively and discreetly as possible, although the degree of mercy shown by the Academy in the process will vary depending on the offender's intent. At best, an offender who is well-meaning (if misguided) will undergo telepathic memory alteration, leaving him or her totally ignorant of the Academy. Offenders with darker aims will face harassment by the Chinese government, who might even call in members of the Heavenly Exploding Mandate to deal with any nova troublemakers. If an offender doesn't take that hint, then he or she will likely wind up being assassinated by either Silence or one of her student assassins, preferably in as discreet a manner as possible. If discretion isn't possible (and it usually isn't when the offender belongs to the HTT), then the Academy will seek to make the killing look like a hit by either the Nakato Gumi yakuza or the Camparelli-Zhukov Megasyndicate.

- **Membership:** The Koltsov Academy consists of about eighty-five novas, counting the five novas who make up the senior staff. Most of the Academy's other novas can be written up at the 30 nova point level, aside from a few child novas (20 nova points) and a pair of second-generation novas who are still toddlers as of 2015. The rest of the Academy's ranks are padded out with about 400 assorted baselines, who are family members of Academy novas, skilled professionals on the run from the PRC or the Triads, or latent novas that the Academy's agents have rescued. While only three students out of the Academy's current class have erupted as of 2015, the other 47 students are reassured that their own eruptions will come in time.

- **Activities:** Aside from fomenting revolution through the People's Republic of China and the normal routine of life in the Deep City and the Academy, Ludmilla Zhdanov's group engages in three other main activities.

- Covert war against the Heaven Thunder Triad and whoever is controlling them. Grandfather Monkey is the strongest proponent of wiping out the Heaven Thunder Triad *en masse*, given how widespread and vicious they are. Ludmilla agrees with him, and has authorized a plan to do just that. Martin Zhang, the Academy's resident pharmaceutical wizard, has come up with an improved version of neurophyzine. (This drug is known on the street as "brain burn", see pg. 13 of **Aberrant: Underworld** for details.) Zhang's version of "brain burn" differs from normal neurophyzine in three ways. First, the drug is extremely difficult to detect in a subject's bloodstream, even with a test that's specifically looking for it (+5 difficulty penalty to detect). Second, the drug is extremely difficult for a baseline's system to metabolize, and will remain in a subject's brain for 10 years. Third, the required dosage for the drug to be effective is extremely minute. Using a wide variety of delivery methods (including nanotech mosquitoes acquired from DeVries through cutouts), Academy agents have tracked down and dosed almost all of the Heaven Thunder Triad's baseline membership within China and a good chunk of those outside China over the last three years. Once Grandfather Monkey determines an auspicious moment for the Academy, Ludmilla will send out a simple telepathic pulse throughout China by means of Mallory's Psychotronic Resonator. The telepathic pulse won't have any effect on even the weakest-willed baselines, but it will be sufficient to trigger the neurophyzine in the brains of the baseline HTT members. With most of the baseline membership out of the way, Ludmilla will call in her markers in the Chinese government to have the Heavenly Exploding Mandate arrest the nova members of the HTT. As all of the HTT novas are wanted for multiple charges of murder, drug trafficking, and other myriad crimes; a quick conviction and speedy execution will be the likeliest result. (The HTT's nova rogues' gallery would include the Ho Brothers, Chun Lao Fut, and Shining Mountain. Stats on these individuals can be found in **Aberrant: Underworld** and **Aberrant: Year One**.)

- Acting as an archival service for nova inventors and scientists worldwide. Face it, running an operation like the Koltsov Academy takes serious money, and even someone as rich as Ludmilla Zhdanov can't foot all of the bills. Provided that a nova scientist passes the Academy's background check, he or she will receive an untraceable message offering the services of the "McKay Brothers Archival Service". As Grandfather Monkey screens potential clients with his precognitive visions, most scientists contacted in this way eagerly accept this quiet offer and pay a very healthy fee. The Academy will then store multiple copies of scientific information (blueprints, genetic records, etc.) for him in their protected data-vaults. In this way, a client scientist can retain all of his data from his researches and experiments, even if his lab should be looted by industrial spies, organized crime thugs, or even Project Utopia's Technological Regulation Division. At no time will the Academy sell or otherwise release a client's information to another party, although the Academy will always retain copies of the data for itself. The Academy does not advertise this service, whose clients are contacted through a series of dummy corporations that even the Aeon Society's analysts would have serious trouble unraveling. If an investigator did manage to get that far, all he

would find would be the "Dancing Rat Trading Company" based out of Hong Kong. As that also happens to be the name of an entirely different business under the control of the Nakato Gumi yakuza, it makes for a very efficient way to send an investigator barking up the wrong tree.

- Educating and training the students. Despite their somewhat surreal environment, students at the Koltsov Academy still have to attend various classes and perform schoolwork. Ludmilla personally sees to it that each and every one of the Academy's students receives an education of such quality that it outshines anything they could receive from the most prestigious universities or colleges in the outside world. Ludmilla has also made her own highly-progressive views on education (which some in the education establishment would call dangerously radical) the basis for how all courses are taught at the Academy, and has personally trained all of the Academy's educators in her education methods. This has resulted in a student body that not only looks forward to attending class, but also consistently outperforms the students at any other educational institutions on the entire planet. In game terms, Koltsov Academy students will tend to have more dots in their Abilities than is normal. The Storyteller is within her rights to have beginning characters educated at the Koltsov Academy spend 1 or 2 of their nova points on Ability dots to reflect this. Grandfather Monkey handles all of the students' training in the use of their quantum powers, which he carries out in a very cautious manner. As he appreciates just how dangerous quantum powers can be in the hands of children and teenagers, Grandfather Monkey will generally limit himself to teaching a student nova to master whatever powers that she has already developed. He will also train a student nova to develop certain enhancements of his choosing for whatever Mega-Attributes the student already possesses. Any student wishing to receive training to develop new quantum powers and/or Mega-Attributes must undergo an intensive psychological evaluation from Ludmilla, who will relay the results to Grandfather Monkey for his final decision. Since he regards this training in much the same manner that martial arts masters do their own special techniques; Grandfather Monkey will go to extensive lengths to have the aspiring student prove her worthiness, sound judgement and emotional maturity with special tests long before giving her any such training. The lone exception to this is when a student already has manifested dangerous powers, in which case Grandfather Monkey will eagerly train the student to develop the Prudence enhancement (and a dot of Mega-Wits, if necessary) at first opportunity. These requirements have been waived somewhat in the case of the Koltsov Academy's senior staff; but that is only due to the fact that 1: Grandfather Monkey knows his colleagues' personalities inside and out, and 2: he has already tested them many times over. However, Grandfather Monkey has flatly refused to train anyone to develop his "Quantum Mentor" power to date, as he considers it to be his ultimate special technique. In private conversation, he has hinted to Ludmilla that he might teach it to Vo Pai-lu once she develops enough maturity to use that power wisely...when she's about 50 or 60 years older, perhaps.

The Deep City

The Deep City rests in a series of caverns somewhere deep beneath the peaks of the Himalayan mountain range. The cave system consists of a ring of twelve caverns, each the size of three American football fields, around a dome-shaped central cavern that's 16 kilometers wide and a full kilometer high at the center. Resident geologists at the Academy insist that the cave system cannot be natural, but most residents simply accept that as a given. A unique plant which the residents call the Sunvine provides the cave system with artificial sunlight and weather, and the floors of the caverns are actually the surface of a 30 meter deep layer of soil. The cave system itself is mostly dead, with underground streams running from a spring in the central cavern that provides a more than adequate water supply for the Deep City's needs. While the twelve outer caverns are used strictly for farming, the central cavern houses the various residential and small-scale industrial buildings, including the Academy itself. All the buildings have running water and electrical service but have no central heating, as the Sunvine somehow maintains a subtropical environment within the cave system. There is little of the rampant mold and fungal growth that one would expect to find in a closed environment, which is another oddity that the residents attribute to the Sunvine.

The residents of the Deep City engage in all of the normal activities one would find in a healthy small community. The residents' society is close and tightly-knit. There is no money in use here, as the residents have worked out a surprisingly accurate barter system for goods and services. The Deep City boasts a very good clinic (almost a small hospital), the workshops of various skilled craftsmen and technicians, and even a small textile factory from which garments and other cloth goods are made. The unique environment of the Deep City makes agriculture very feasible, and there are many small-scale gardens to supplement the produce of the large farms in the outer cavern ring. Due to the closed environment, only small livestock such as goats, rabbits, frogs, and various fish and shellfish are raised in the farms. European honeybees are also kept, both to aid plant fertilization and for their honey. The residents have found that only dwarf varieties of trees can grow here, and limit themselves to growing various fruit trees in the gardens of the central cavern. Biomass is imported mainly in the form of bamboo and other plant produce that the resident botanists haven't perfected dwarf varieties of yet. While the Deep City isn't entirely self-sufficient yet, they're working on it. Educational courses at the Academy are free to all residents who are interested (read: everyone with any spare time), resulting in an atmosphere that's a blend of a college town, a small farming community, and a survivalist camp. The Academy does import media from the outside world, but always provides its own commentary on the subject matter's truthfulness. While this isn't outright censorship, most residents of the Deep City have learned to recognize disinformation thanks to this practice, which the Academy hopes to discontinue in a few decades.

The Crystal Idol

Next to the Academy itself, an ancient shrine stands within a small grove of dwarf cherry trees. This is where Grandfather Monkey keeps his residence, and also where he guards the Deep City's greatest secret. Hidden within a locked, windowless inner

chamber of the shrine is a meter-tall statuette of a very calm-looking ancient Chinese goddess, possibly Kuan Yin. The statuette is of very fine workmanship, and is carved from a crystal that somehow glows with its own golden light. Grandfather Monkey is the only person in the Deep City - perhaps in the entire world - who can come closer than three meters to the Crystal Idol. No one else can get any closer to the Idol, regardless of what power they may have or lack. The Crystal Idol emanates a unique telluric aura, which has certain benefits for novas who are exposed to it on a long-term basis. Only Ludmilla Zhdanov and the other members of the Academy's senior staff know of the Crystal Idol's existence.

As an Artifact-level Gadget, the Crystal Idol has the following effects:

- Novas who reside in the Deep City for more than five consecutive days will find that they can rid themselves of a point of temporary Taint with only a day's worth of relaxation and a successful Meditation roll, provided that they either remain "dormed down" or limit themselves to using their quantum powers at half-strength. Shedding permanent Taint is also possible here, but requires a nova to spend two entire months within the Deep City. After that, a nova can spend 10 experience points to rid herself of a dot of permanent Taint once per month, provided that she spends most of that month living within the Deep City. If a nova manages to reduce her permanent Taint to 0 in this manner, she can then spend 5 experience points to gain the "Taint Resistant" Merit. The nova will retain any aberrations she might have accumulated, which are then counted as Flaws. (*Aberrant Players Guide*, pp. 91-92) In exchange for this; novas who manage to shed Taint in the Deep City permanently lose the option of buying Tainted Quantum, Mega-Attributes, enhancements or quantum powers with experience points. (*Aberrant* core book, p. 124)

- Novas with powers such as Matter Creation or the Molecular Alteration technique of Molecular Manipulation will find creating permanent objects to be much easier, costing only a temporary Willpower point instead of a permanent Willpower point.

- Latent novas who erupt in the Deep City cannot buy Tainted Quantum, Mega-Attributes, enhancements or quantum powers; either at the time of character creation or with experience points. In exchange for this, they gain the "Taint Resistant" Merit free of charge. If such a nova develops Mega-Intelligence, she will also automatically receive "Taint Resistance" as her free enhancement.

- Novas that have either erupted or rid themselves of Taint in the Deep City are rendered incapable of ever developing aberrations that generate Taint energies and/or harmful radiation. Such aberrations include Black Thumb, Contagious, some forms of Energy Emission, Eufiber Rejection, Radioactive, and Taint Bleed. (*Aberrant* core book pp. 152-153 and *Aberrant Players Guide* pp. 94-96)

- Novas that have either erupted or rid themselves of Taint in the Deep City are rendered permanently incapable of ever gaining a Chrysalis rating. Novas that already have a Chrysalis rating are permanently incapable of receiving any benefits from the Crystal Idol. (*Aberrant: Teragen*, pp. 116-125)

• Novas that have either erupted or rid themselves of Taint in the Deep City are rendered permanently incapable of ever developing the Node Spark quantum power. (**Aberrant: Teragen**, p. 127)

Dramatis Personae

Ludmilla Konstantinovna Zhdanov

Background: Born to Konstantin and Olga Zhdanov in 1953, Ludmilla proved to be an inquisitive and perceptive child from a very young age. If she had been born in a First World nation, her natural curiosity would likely have been encouraged, allowing her intellect to grow unimpeded. Unfortunately her parents were both officials in Moscow's city administration and Communist Party members in good standing. Even though Josef Stalin had died a few months before Ludmilla's birth, the Soviet Union was still a very dangerous place for people who asked questions instead of blindly accepting the propaganda put out by the Communist Party. Frantic to keep their young daughter from being disappeared, Ludmilla's parents taught her to keep quiet and to never even hint that she disagreed with the official Party propaganda. Ludmilla obeyed, and managed to reach adulthood without incident. After acquiring degrees in both psychology and general medicine from the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Ludmilla tried to bury her dissatisfaction with life under the Soviet regime by immersing herself both in her job and in reading the works of the Russian lyric poet Aleksei Vasilievich Koltsov.

But even when taking care of her patients' physical and mental health, Ludmilla was constantly confronted with evidence of the difference between Soviet claims and actual reality. While the Kremlin boasted of Russia's growing population, she noted that her country had actually been losing population ever since World War II. When Khrushchev proclaimed that the Soviet Bloc would overtake the world, Ludmilla knew that Russia was doing well just to hold itself together as a nation. What the Communist Party called a worker's paradise; Ludmilla knew as a land filled with despair, apathy, and alcoholism. Finally deciding to rebel, she became involved in one of the underground dissident movements, where she became one of the most successful writers and distributors of *samizdat* (banned literature). A KGB agent's lucky shot resulted in serious damage to her left knee, but Ludmilla didn't let that stop her. When the Soviet regime finally fell in the 1990's, Ludmilla wasn't celebrating. She had seen how easily former Communist party officials had adopted the outer forms of democracy, and knew that underneath the new face of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the same old corruption would flourish. All her years of hard work had accomplished nothing of any lasting value. On March 22nd of 1998, Ludmilla took a handful of sleeping pills, washed them down with a jar of rotgut vodka, and waited to die. And then the *Galatea* exploded.

Eruption changed Ludmilla's outlook radically, to say the least. With her newly-augmented intellect, she recognized all of the problems that had rendered her prior efforts useless, and realized how she could deal with them. She moved to Hong Kong, became a Chinese citizen, and started building her financial base. Once she had enough money, material and people; she founded the Koltsov Academy. While she still maintains a very nice townhouse in the Mid-Levels of Hong Kong's Victoria Peak

neighborhood, the Deep City and the Academy have been her true home for quite some time.

Image: Ludmilla is an very pale-skinned Caucasian woman of mixed Hungarian and White Russian descent. Her eyes are grey; and her dark green, straight hair would be long enough to reach down to the middle of her back if she didn't keep it in a very severe-looking bun. She appears to be in her mid-20s, but has the manner of a much more mature and serious woman. Ludmilla can usually be found wearing a eufiber suit that mimics either black or charcoal grey women's business attire. She disdains makeup and all but the simplest jewelry, but most people who have met her agree that she doesn't need them at all. Ludmilla walks with a noticeable limp, and uses an ironwood walking cane to offset her knee injury. Despite having several opportunities to have the damage to her left knee corrected, she has refused to do so, remarking that she's always found it a helpful reminder not to let herself become overconfident.

Roleplaying Hints: Before you erupted, you wasted your time and effort trying to breathe some life back into your moribund homeland. Sadly, you didn't know a lost cause when you saw it back then. You were doomed to fail, and were also weary enough in spirit to attempt suicide when you realized that. Now, your eruption has given you a second chance. Keep your frivolity safely tucked away beneath your serious exterior, and be careful! There will be time enough for you to laugh and enjoy yourself once China (if not the world) is a safe place for children to grow up in. There are too many good people who depend on you to risk failure again. Someone's got to protect the children, so why not you?

Storyteller Note: By now you might've noticed that despite some vague similarities; Ludmilla Zhdanov isn't a certain bald, wheelchair-bound telepath, and the Koltsov Academy isn't a certain School for Gifted Youngsters. Both the characters and institutions are different, even if some of their basic goals are the same. So feel free to let your players set up their own "nova school" in your **Aberrant** chronicle, if that's what's fun for them. It's not like the Koltsov Academy advertises its existence in the manner of Harvard University, after all...

Gear: Laptop computer, cell phone, ironwood cane. When a situation gets really dangerous, she'll also carry a heavy pistol loaded with hypercore rounds (See **Aberrant: Brainwaves** for details).

Nature: Caregiver

Allegiance: Koltsov Academy

Occupation: Financier, Teacher, Headmistress of the Koltsov Academy

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Appearance 3, Manipulation 5, Charisma 5

Abilities: Academics 5 (Geopolitics, History), Analysis 5, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Biz 5 (Stocks and Bonds), Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 4, Command 3, Computer 3, Drive 2, Endurance 4, Etiquette 4, Firearms 4 (Pistols), Instruction 5 (Lecture, Mental Abilities), Interrogation 2, Intimidation 2, Intrusion 3, Investigation 4, Linguistics 5 (Russian native, Chinese, English, Latin, Spanish, Tibetan), Martial Arts 4 (Prone Fighting), Medicine 5 (First Aid, Novas, Psychology), Meditation 4, Melee 4 (Short Staff), Resistance 4, Science 5 (Biology), Stealth 4,

Style 3, Rapport 5, Streetwise 4 (Information), Subterfuge 5, Thought Discipline 5, Tradecraft 5

Backgrounds: Allies 6 (Sophia Rousseau, Maxwell Anderson Mercer, Koltsov Academy staff), Backing 5 (Koltsov Academy), Cipher 5, Contacts 4, Dormancy 4, Eufiber 2, Followers 8 (Koltsov Academy), Followers 8 (various Chinese revolutionaries), Influence 8 (various people throughout the Chinese government, armed forces and intellectual establishment), Node 4, Resources 5, Sanctum 5 (The Academy's Himalayan base).

Ludmilla Zhdanov has the In Charge, Kingpin, Sanctum Sanctorum and Wealth Beyond Avarice Background enhancements; as seen in the **Adventure!** core book.

Ludmilla also has the Legions Background enhancement for both of her Followers Backgrounds, reflecting that she has rallied both a large nova organization (the Academy) and thousands of Chinese baseline revolutionaries to her banner.

Merits and Flaws: *Lame* (-2), *Taint Resistant* (5). Ludmilla also has the "Chromatic Hair" aberration as a Flaw (for -1 point).

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 40, Willpower 10, Taint 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina •• (Adaptability, Health, Tireless x2), Mega-Perception •••• (Body Awareness, Psychic Awareness, Quantum Attunement, That Creepy Feeling), Mega-Intelligence ••••• (Discerning Mind, Eidetic Memory, Fast Learner, Financial Prodigy, Investigative Prodigy, Intuitive Deduction, Linguistic Genius, Medical Prodigy, Taint Resistance), Mega-Wits •••• (Foresight, Hypercognition, Lie Detector, Mind Over Matter, Multitasking, Natural Empath, Prudence, Unfazeable), Mega-Appearance • (Ms. Nobody), Mega-Manipulation •••• (Mediator, Persuader, Subtle, Trickster, The Voice), Mega-Charisma ••••• (Autonomy, Dreadful Mien, Pedagogue*, Politesse, Soothe).

* Ludmilla can use Pedagogue in tandem with her Telepathy, allowing her to teach people through mental contact. This is how she's been training the various revolutionary elements that she's fomented throughout China.

Quantum Powers: Armor ••••, Density Control (Increase) •••••, Disrupt •••••, Domination ••••• (Telepathic), Healing ••••, Intuition •••••, Luck •••••, Mental Blast ••••, Mirage ••••, Psychic Shield •••••, Telepathy ••••• (Surreptitious).

Grandfather Monkey

Background: In the more remote villages of Yunnan Province, one can still hear tales about the Monkey Who Walks Like A Man. After walking out of the forest in the spring of 1923, this living incarnation of mischief also proved himself a friend to innocent people, especially those who were preyed on by the honorless. Quickly becoming a thorn in the side of triads and corrupt government officials throughout China, the Monkey even foiled the plans of the Ubiquitous Dragon more than once. The tales end with the story of how in 1930, with the aid of a group of Western adventurers, the Monkey kept the magical treasure of a hidden city buried deep beneath Shanghai safely out of the Ubiquitous Dragon's clutches. The Monkey apparently sacrificed himself in the process; as the buried city and all it contained vanished as if it had never been, leaving only solid bedrock in its place.

When the Monkey awoke, he found that the buried city now resided under the Himalayan mountain range in Tibet. He also felt incredible new powers surging through his body and spirit, which he attributed to an obviously magical idol carved from glowing crystal that resided in the underground city's central shrine. Finding a passage from the city to the surface was easy. Making sense of what he found on the surface was not. After rescuing a British journalist from a gang of bandits, the Monkey's mind was soon reeling as he got a quick history lesson on what all had happened in the world between 1930 and 2008.

The only thing that kept Monkey from being overwhelmed by culture shock was the obvious need of the people in this future time for true wisdom. Almost everything else on Earth had changed in some way or another, and the potential for global destruction had only grown with time, but human nature remained the same as it ever was. Then and there, the Monkey decided that it would be his mission to hand down the wisdom he had learned to the denizens of this "Nova Age". Placing himself in a deep meditative trance in order to divine how to best go about this monumental task, he had a vision of a wealthy expatriate Russian woman who lived in Hong Kong. Once the Monkey met Ludmilla Zhdanov, the Koltsov Academy was born.

Image: Grandfather Monkey stands (fully upright) about 145 centimeters tall, has a coat of white and light brown fur, and has a tail that's about 2 meters long. Putting it bluntly, he looks like the biggest long-tailed macaque you ever saw, dressed in traditional Chinese peasant men's clothes. He also wears a bowl-shaped straw hat of the type known as a *sando-gasa* in Japan, which is a souvenir from an old friend.

Roleplaying Hints: You're pleasant, genial, wise beyond your years and genuinely enjoy helping young people with their problems. All of these qualities help to make you an excellent teacher. Helping to mold children into honorable, healthy and capable adults has become one of your greatest joys. While Ludmilla may be the brain and life of the Academy, you are its heart and conscience. While many things of this future time are valuable, so are many things of the past. You have learned to take the best from both, and you teach your students to do the same. You're not as eager to engage in violence as you once were, but you will do your best to defend your new family from anyone stupid enough to threaten them.

Gear: Staff, cell phone, various supplies for traditional Chinese medicine. Grandfather Monkey will also carry a straight sword for use in combat, although he will stoop to using a rifle if circumstances require it.

Nature: Confidant

Allegiance: Koltsov Academy

Occupation: Teacher, "talent scout", unofficial mayor and militia leader, shrine caretaker

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 5, Appearance 4, Manipulation 5, Charisma 5

Abilities: Academics 5 (Martial Arts history, Taoism), Athletics 5, Awareness 5, Brawl 2, Command 5, Endurance 5, Etiquette 2, Firearms 5 (Rifle), Instruction 5 (Physical Abilities), Interrogation 4, Intimidation 4, Intrusion 3, Investigation 4, Linguistics 5 (Chinese native, English, Korean, Japanese, Russian, Vietnamese), Martial Arts 5 (Kung Fu, Multiple

Opponents, Tai Ch'i Ch'uan), Medicine 5 (Traditional Chinese), Meditation 5, Melee 5 (Knives, Quarterstaff, Tai Ch'i Sword), Rapport 5, Resistance 5, Shadowing 5, Stealth 5, Streetwise 5 (Chinese Triads), Subterfuge 5, Survival 5 (Forage, Set Traps, Track), Tactics 5 (Nova, Small-Unit), Thought Discipline 5, Tracraft 3

Grandfather Monkey also has Ability Mastery in Athletics, Awareness, Firearms, Instruction, Martial Arts, Meditation, and Melee; as seen in the **Adventure!** core book.

Backgrounds: Allies 6 (Sophia Rousseau, Maxwell Anderson Mercer, the Koltsov Academy staff), Attunement 4, Backing 5 (Koltsov Academy), Cipher 5, Contacts 5 (in the most unexpected places), Eufiber 2, Gadget 5 (the Crystal Idol), Node 4, Reputation 3, Resources 4, Sanctum 5.

Grandfather Monkey also has the Artifact, In Charge, and Sanctum Sanctorum Background enhancements, as seen in the **Adventure!** core book.

Merits and Flaws: Anachronism: time-lost castaway from 1930 (-1), Is actually a long-tailed macaque nova instead of a human-derived nova (-3), Short (-1), Taint Resistant (5).

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 40, Willpower 10, Taint 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength •• (Crush, Quantum Leap), Mega-Dexterity ••••• (Accuracy, Flexibility, Omnidexterity, Physical Prodigy, Catfooted), Mega-Stamina ••• (Adaptability, Durability, Regeneration, Resiliency), Mega-Perception ••••• (Blindfighting, Bloodhound, Hyperenhanced Hearing, Quantum Attunement, Sensory Editing, Ultraperipheral Perception), Mega-Intelligence ••••• (Analyze Weakness, Linguistic Genius, Tactical Prodigy, Taint Resistance), Mega-Wits ••••• (Enhanced Initiative, Prudence, Quickness x3), Mega-Appearance • (Fade, Halo Effect, Mr. Nobody*), Mega-Manipulation ••••• (Persuader, Trickster), Mega-Charisma ••••• (Amiable, Autonomy, Bestial Rapport, Endearing, Pedagogue, Trustworthy)

* Grandfather Monkey's Mr. Nobody enhancement makes him look like an average long-tailed macaque in all but size. He must use his Sizemorph (Shrink) power in tandem with Mr. Nobody in order to pass himself off as a normal long-tailed macaque.

Quantum Powers: Animal/Plant Mastery ••••• (Nature Mastery), Armor •••••, Body Modification: Brachiator, Body Modification: Tendril (prehensile tail), Bounce ••••• (Momentum Transfer), Claws ("Chi Strike") ••••• (Kinetic Discharge), Intuition •••••, Invulnerability: Physical ••••• (Broad Category), Invulnerability: Energy ••••• (Broad Category), Mental Blast •••, Premonition •••••, Pretercognition •••••, Psychic Shield •••••, Quantum Imprint •••••, Sensory Shield •••••, Sizemorph (Shrink) •• (Full Power), Telepathy ••• (Surreptitious), Quantum Mentor ••••• (This level 3 power allows Grandfather Monkey to teach other novas to develop any quantum power, Extra, Mega-Attribute or enhancement that he has himself or can mimic. Use the mechanics for the Pedagogue enhancement, using Quantum Mentor + Instruction instead of Charisma + Instruction, with the dice from Grandfather Monkey's Quantum Trait treated as Mega-Charisma dice. Please note that this power cannot be used to help raise a nova's Quantum Trait or shed Taint by means of the Crystal Idol.)

Vo "Silence" Pai-lu

Background: Born in the spring of 1984 to a mixed Chinese-Korean family residing in Hoeryong, Vo Pai-lu never seemed satisfied with her life. Growing up under the harsh, totalitarian regime of the "Great Leader" Kim Il Sung wasn't enjoyable, and life under the rule of his son Kim Jong-il was no better. Vo Pai-lu's parents were better off than most North Korean families, as they were merchants who profited from the cross-border trade with China, but their family life was nowhere near as healthy. Pai-lu's father became dictatorial and paranoid, fearful that any off-hand comment the secret police deemed "inappropriate" might get them thrown into prison. Her mother began drinking to deal with her stress, and was soon getting herself ripped to the gills whenever she had the free time and money. Pai-lu could only watch in silent horror and despair as her older brother, effectively brainwashed by his government-trained teachers, left to join the North Korean Army.

As if in reflection of the worsening condition of Vo Pai-lu's family, conditions in the nation as a whole became dire when China cut back on grain exports to North Korea in 1995. As famine began to spread throughout North Korea, the Vo family's prospects became increasingly dim. Plenty of North Koreans were traveling to Hoeryong, but only so that they could find whatever refuge they could across the border in China. Precious little money, food, or supplies were coming into North Korea; and most of that went to the supporters of Kim Jong-il and his cronies. Their situation becoming bleaker by the second, in the summer of 1998 Pai-lu's parents sold off their 14 year old daughter to a Shanghai "businessman" for a month's supply of food and rice. Later that night, Pai-lu knew that things were only going to get worse for her as the Chinese "businessman" had two of his thugs take her out of the room she shared with the other enslaved Korean girls. Once in the chief slaver's room, Pai-lu's terror and revulsion grew too great for her to bear as one thug began to strangle her while the other tore at her clothes. The next thing she knew the Chinese slaver and both thugs were dead on the floor, fresh human blood was dripping from her hands, and her skin was turning shockingly pale with unnatural speed. Trying to make some sense out of this situation, she looked up and saw a giant long-tailed macaque, dressed in Chinese peasant's garb and smiling genially at her. Right then and there, Vo Pai-lu knew that she had finally gone stark raving mad.

Taking the frightened girl into their care, Grandfather Monkey and Ludmilla Zhdanov explained to Pai-lu that she wasn't insane, but had instead erupted and become a nova. Under their tutelage, they educated her among the first class of students at the Koltsov Academy. Unfortunately they couldn't repair Pai-lu's vocal chords, which had become permanently damaged at the point of her eruption. The resilient Korean girl didn't let her supposed "handicap" slow her down in the least, and was soon skilled enough to begin aiding Grandfather Monkey on his forays outside of the Academy. Taking the nickname "Silence", Pai-lu has become the Koltsov Academy's best covert operative, and helped to inflict serious damage to the Heaven Thunder Triad's operations over the years. Life has gotten even better for Pai-lu in recent years, as she fell in love with another rescued North Korean slave girl that the Academy had rescued

and recruited. Having erupted herself soon after arriving at the Academy, Kim Guiyang returned Pai-lu's feelings wholeheartedly, and the couple married. Thanks to creative use of Pai-lu's nova abilities they now hold the honor of being the first real family in the Koltsov Academy; as Vo Guiyang gave birth to healthy fraternal twins, a girl and a boy. Both children were born as novas, and the entire Academy follows their progress with eager glee. Vo Guiyang hasn't ruled out the possibility of the couple having more children once the twins are older, but insists that Pai-lu should be the one who gets pregnant the next time around. Pai-lu gets nervous whenever her wife brings that up in conversation, and changes the subject as soon as she can manage it.

Image: Vo Pai-lu is a slim, beautiful Korean woman seemingly in her early 20s, and looks to be only mildly athletic at best. Her short hair and skin are both albino-white, and her eyes are pink. Despite appearances (no pun intended), Pai-lu doesn't suffer from actual albinism, as she can operate in daylight as easily as anyone else. She normally shapes her eufiber suits into dark, loose clothing with a hooded black poncho. When she's on a job for the Academy, she'll wear whatever appearance and clothing she deems necessary.

Roleplaying Hints: There are two sides to you, and which one a person will see depends on whether you're on a mission for the Academy or not. When on a mission you strive to be the consummate professional; whether you're arranging for another latent nova kid to escape to the Academy, or for one more Triad scumbag to die at your hands. When not on a mission you're a charming young married woman; happily helping your loving wife take care of your children, and thoroughly liked by everyone at the Academy. Despite all of the terrible things that have happened to you in your life, you have an enthusiasm, a hunger for life that inspires those around you to get the most out of their existences. And now that you have a real family, both with the Academy and with your wife and children, you'll let nothing take them away from you.

Gear: Cell phone adapted for text messaging, various weapons and explosive devices, cheap sunglasses

Nature: Survivor

Allegiance: Koltsov Academy

Occupation: Assistant militia leader, transporter, head of covert operations

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Appearance 5, Manipulation 5, Charisma 5

Abilities: Artillery 5 (Mortars), Athletics 5, Awareness 5, Brawl 3, Command 4, Demolitions 5 (Disarming/Disposal, Timed Charges, Shaped Charges), Endurance 5, Firearms 5 (Pistols), Heavy Weapons 5 (Maintenance), Intimidation 5 (Silent Urging), Intrusion 5 (Security Systems), Investigation 4, Linguistics 4 (Korean native, English, Chinese, Japanese, Sign Language), Medicine 2 (First Aid), Meditation 5, Might 5 (Leap), Throwing 5 (Grenades, Knives), Martial Arts 5 (Blind Fighting, Dirty Maneuvers, Multiple Opponents), Melee 5 (Improvised Weapons, Knives, Sword), Navigation 5, Rapport 5, Resistance 5, Shadowing 5, Stealth 5 (Ambush, Sneak, Trail), Streetwise 5 (Chinese Triads), Subterfuge 5 (Conceal Motivation), Survival 5

(Hunt, Set Traps, Track), Tactics 4 (Nova), Thought Discipline 5, Tradecraft 3

Backgrounds: Allies 5 (her wife Vo Guiyang, Koltsov Academy staff), Attunement 5, Backing 4 (Koltsov Academy), Contacts 3, Dormancy 3, Eufiber 5, Node 4, Resources 4.

Merits and Flaws: Dependants: Vo Ruijie and Vo Chia-ling, 2 year old son and daughter, second-generation novas (-5), Minority: Lesbian (-1), Mute (-2), Taint Resistant (5). Silence also has the "Colored Skin" aberration as a Flaw (for -2 points). Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 38, Willpower 9, Taint 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength •• (Crush, Quantum Leap, Thrower), Mega-Dexterity ••••• (Accuracy, Catfooted, Feather Foot, Ghostly Movement, Perfect Balance, Rapid Strike, Silent Running, Tenacity), Mega-Stamina ••••• (Adaptability, Durability, Health, Resiliency x2, Sanitized Metabolism), Mega-Perception •• (Analytic Scent, Blindfighting, Bloodhound, That Creepy Feeling), Mega-Intelligence ••• (Analyze Weakness, Tactical Prodigy, Taint Resistance, Wayfarer), Mega-Wits ••• (Autopilot, Enhanced Initiative, Prudence, Quickness x3, Redirection), Mega-Appearance ••• (Copycat, Fade, Incognito, Metamorph, Mr. Nobody, Yin-Yang), Mega-Manipulation • (Clarity), Mega-Charisma ••• (Autonomy, Bestial Rapport, Disconcerting, Dragon Gaze, Endearing)

Quantum Powers: Armor •••••, Body Modification: Extra Health Levels x6 (4 "Bruised", 4 "Maimed"), Boost: Strength ••• (Extended Effect), Density Control (Decrease) •••••, Disorient •••••, ESP •••••, Healing •••••, Immobilize •••••, Intuition •••••, Premonition •••••, Psychic Shield •••••, Quantum Leech ••••• (Energy Siphon), Spatial Manipulation ••••• (Enhance/Diminish*, Platform, Ripple Shield, Shaping**, Spatial Shockwave), Telepathy •••, Teleport ••••• (Stealth Teleport- attempts to track Silence's teleports are made at [Quantum + Teleport] difficulties), Warp •••••

* This allows Silence to expand or constrict the space within the area of effect by 25% per success.

** This allows Silence to "shape" a given volume of space as she desires, along with any objects or beings within that space. This cannot be used to directly harm living beings.

Martin "the Archivist" Zhang

Background: The eldest child of a wealthy Hong Kong banker and his wife, Martin Zhang always felt more than a little out of place in the upper-crust social elite of the former Crown Colony. Apparently his being a child prodigy wasn't enough for Martin's parents, as they saw fit to have him trained in every subject they considered necessary to thrive among his peers in their Victoria Peak neighborhood. By his thirteenth birthday, Martin had finally become proficient with all the weapons (actual and metaphorical) that were used in his parents' social arena. At his birthday party, Martin was looking forward to finally gaining some control over his own life. That hope was shattered when his mother introduced him to a rather pretty neighbor girl by the name of Samantha Luo, and told Martin that his father had a surprise for him. A few minutes later, Martin's father publicly announced the official betrothal of his son to Samantha Luo. Martin simply stood in a kind of walking shock as he tried to understand why his parents had done this to him without even

asking his opinion on the matter. His way out from this seemingly inescapable situation came from a most unexpected source.

The mental stress of his father's announcement had been enough to trigger Martin's M-R node, causing him to erupt right in front of everyone. Frightened by the sight of expensive furniture romping around like rodeo bulls, all of the partygoers fled posthaste. Martin's father, on the other hand, saw his son's eruption as yet another opportunity to be exploited. Soon Martin found himself in a quiet, very expensive pharmaceutical laboratory with some very skilled researchers, who welcomed the chance to work with a nova of Martin's superhuman intellect. Taking to the work like a duck to water, he spent a very happy month helping the researchers find applications for a wide range of very unusual biochemicals. In fact, they were *so* unusual that Martin had never seen anything like them in the biochemistry labs of his college. Doubts began to form in the young nova's mind, and were confirmed when he hacked into the computer network of his father's bank. The Heaven Thunder Triad had been using the bank to launder money, which was easily done since Martin's father was a Triad member in good standing. And even worse, the lab that Martin was working at was researching uses for the novel biochemicals harvested from novas' bodies!

Feeling sick, Martin knew he couldn't be a part of this obscenity any longer. Lashing out with his power over molecular structures, he reduced the entire lab building to dust in an eye blink. That was when an albino woman appeared out of nowhere and grabbed him. Finding himself facing a giant, talking long-tailed macaque a moment later, Martin agreed to help the odd pair raid a Heaven Thunder Triad nova-rendering operation. The raid went off without a hitch thanks to Martin's aid, and Grandfather Monkey asked him to join the Koltsov Academy. Martin agreed, on the condition that his little sister Michelle would be allowed to join him there and live with him. Smiling, Grandfather Monkey agreed to the deal, and both Zhang siblings left Hong Kong with them and the rescued latent novas for the Academy. The fact that Michelle recently erupted as a nova herself at the Academy might have had something to do with Grandfather Monkey's decision, but neither he nor Martin will comment on it. Martin's parents were both killed soon after Martin joined the Academy, presumably as punishment for failing the Heaven Thunder Triad. Both Martin and Michelle were too busy (and too happy) in their new life at the Academy to give them much thought.

While the last four years have been good to Martin and Michelle, he's had some problems. One of the rescued latent novas, Fei Xiu Lian, has recently both erupted and begun seriously attempting to court Martin. A girl from Hong Kong's Sheung Wan district, Martin won her heart when he personally saved her from being killed by an enraged Triad thug. Xiu Lian is now one of Grandfather Monkey's assistant martial arts teachers. Another problem was the return of Samantha Luo into Martin's life a year later, as she had also erupted and was recruited into the Academy by Silence. Immediately upon seeing Martin there at the Academy, Samantha cried out in joy, hugged him and declared Martin to be her long-lost fiancé! That didn't sit well with Xiu Lian at all, of course. Samantha is now Ludmilla's best surgeon. Their running competition for Martin's love continues to this day, with no end currently in sight. Ludmilla

turns a blind eye to this situation, as it provides the rest of the Academy's staff and the student body with some much-needed amusement and entertainment. Martin also suffers from periodic nightmares about what he saw at the nova-rendering plant that he helped raid. For his part, Martin forges ahead the best he can, as he's been far too busy to sort out his feelings for his pair of admirers. When this all gets to be too much for him, he relieves his stress by working in the Academy's kitchens. Since he's the Academy's best cook, bar none, nobody minds his taking a turn in the kitchens one bit.

Image: Martin Zhang is a stunningly handsome 18 year old Chinese man who would look more in place at a nightclub than in a laboratory. His eyes are black, and his short black hair has developed a patch of white above his right temple. He can normally be found dressed in casual garb (he has a particular fondness for very loud Hawaiian floral print shirts and Levi's blue jeans). He refuses to wear formal attire, as it reminds him too much of his privileged childhood.

Roleplaying Hints: The lab is close to being your native element, as that's where you can best work your wonders for the Academy's benefit. The fact that those wonders are often used to stymie the plans of the Heaven Thunder Triad is the just the icing on the cake. Being able to keep watch over the fantastic scientific and technological data that the Academy keeps squirreled away in their vault is another rare privilege, and one that you appreciate. No two ways about it, the Academy has been a dream come true for you. Here, you have a real home, with a family that's better to you and your sister than your parents ever were. Even Xiu Lian and Samantha are good friends of yours; at least when they're not trying to drive each other up the wall, fighting over you, or trying another crazy scheme to seduce and/or marry you. Ludmilla and the others on the Academy staff may tease you about your inability to choose between your pair of suitors, but that's the one puzzle you haven't been able solve...yet.

Gear: Laptop computer, cell phone, the latest scientific journals. He'll carry a heavy pistol, possibly loaded with hypercore rounds, in combat situations.

Nature: Analyst

Allegiance: Koltsov Academy

Occupation: Teacher, archivist, general technological and pharmaceutical expert, reserve cook.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Appearance 4, Manipulation 4, Charisma 5

Abilities: Arts 5 (Cooking), Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Biz 2, Brawl 2, Command 2, Computer 5 (Hacking, Programming), Drive 2, Endurance 4, Engineering 5 (Computers, Construction, Electronics), Etiquette 3, Firearms 4, Investigation 3, Linguistics 3 (Chinese native, English, Japanese, Latin), Martial Arts 4, Medicine 5 (Novas, Pharmacy), Rapport 3, Resistance 4, Science 5 (Biology, Chemistry), Seduction 2, Streetwise 3, Style 1, Thought Discipline 5

Backgrounds: Allies 5 (Koltsov Academy staff), Attunement 3, Backing 4 (Koltsov Academy), Contacts 3, Dormancy 3, Node 3, Resources 4. Martin also has 2 dots of the Suitors Adversarial Background, as he is currently being romantically pursued by Fei Xiu Lian and Samantha Luo, two of the Academy's younger

resident female members. (These are Martin's Regular suitors; Xin is 17 years old and Samantha is 19. They're both novas built with 30 nova points, have the Taint Resistance Merit, and lack either Prudence or the Common Sense Merit.)

Merits and Flaws: Dependant: Michelle Zhang, 9 year old little sister and 20-point nova (-4), Nightmares (-1), Taint Resistant (5). Martin also has the "Romantic Irresistibility" aberration as a Flaw (for -3 points).

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 36, Willpower 8, Taint 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity • (Cool Hand, Fast Tasks), Mega-Stamina • (Adaptability, Durability, Health, Tireless), Mega-Perception •• (Analytic Taste/Touch, True Intent), Mega-Intelligence ••• (Chemical Genius, Eidetic Memory, Engineering Prodigy, Fast Learner, Medical Prodigy, Scientific Prodigy, Taint Resistance), Mega-Wits ••• (Artistic Genius, Prudence, Synergy), Mega-Appearance •• (Friendly Face, Immaculate, Objet d'Art), Mega-Manipulation •• (Clarity), Mega-Charisma ••• (Endearing, Pedagogue)

Quantum Powers: Armor •••, Disintegration •••••, Flight ••, Molecular Manipulation ••••• (Animation, Destruction, Molecular Alteration, Second Skin, Shape Alteration), Poison •••••, Psychic Shield •••••, Telekinesis ••••

Isenbard William Mallory

Background: Ever since he saw his first science fiction B-movie as a 15 year old in 1971, William Mallory (he never could stand to be called by his first name) always found himself simultaneously repelled and entranced by the figure of the mad scientist. On one hand, he loved the idea of working scientific wonders in a well-stocked laboratory, and such movies were a welcome escape from his incessant flute lessons. On the other, he hated how the mad scientists were almost always portrayed as irresponsible delusional madmen out for their own glory. This state of mixed emotions persisted into his college days at NYU, where he pursued a double degree in physics and music. The physics degree was what he wanted; but William's parents, both classical musicians who performed at the Metropolitan Opera House, pushed William into following their path as well. The trouble really started when William graduated *summa cum laude* from NYU in 1981 and attempted to find a teaching post where he could try for tenure. Unfortunately for William, his particular line of scientific inquiry led him perilously close to what the scientific establishment deemed "crackpot science". Undeterred by his critics at first, William investigated several "over the rainbow" theories before settling on the field of psychotronics as his chosen field of study. After four years of teaching first-year science courses at a small-town college in upstate New York, William was a laughingstock in American scientific circles. After being forced to quit by a college administration that was embarrassed to have him even teach established science on their campus, William was forced to return to the trade of classical music that he'd loathed since childhood in order to survive.

And so William found himself as the First Flautist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Now that he was playing the flute professionally, William was living what most people would've considered "the good life". As a first-class flautist, he was always getting rave reviews from the critics, and was considered one of the Boston Symphony Orchestra's highlights. William's bank account was growing fatter by the minute, and

his parents' pride in his accomplishment swelled almost as quickly. He was invited to all the best of Boston's parties, was well-regarded by the local social elite, wore fine suits and tuxedos, and was driving a BMW sedan. In almost all respects, it was a 180° turnaround from his threadbare existence as a scientist. But for William, it was nothing more than sheer Hell. In his soul, he still considered himself a scientist. He did not enjoy playing the flute in the slightest, no matter how good the resulting music sounded. (He'd wanted to learn to play the bagpipes as a child, but his parents had flatly forbidden it.) He hated having to dress up in tuxedos and stiff woolen suits, didn't care what his parents thought of him, and thought the critics who praised him so highly were nothing more than overly pompous buffoons. The parties were nothing more than arenas for social sniping, the social elite were closet degenerates, and driving that blasted BMW was surely going to get him killed in an auto accident sometime soon. Worst of all, money couldn't fill the void in his heart. Salvation (of a sort) came in the fall of 1986, in the form of a woman at one of the parties that William so despised.

William was stunned when the blonde woman in the blue dress came up to him and asked him about his scientific research. From that discussion grew friendship, and then full-fledged romance. While taking the hand of Marena Tachlinkov in marriage didn't alter his circumstances very much, they did make them much more bearable. Marena was a scientific researcher herself, who had merely hidden her own investigations into "crackpot science" a bit better than William had, and still had the respect of the American scientific establishment (and tenure). For the next decade their lives passed blissfully, with both William's financial success and scientific skills aiding Marena's secret research into psychotronics. They made several breakthroughs together, and it didn't matter if the results couldn't be published. William and Marena *knew* that they were right. Their time of joy and shared research began to end in the summer of 1996, when Marena came down with a mysterious illness. The doctors were mystified, and finally admitted that they could do nothing for her. William took up the gauntlet of saving his wife with a vengeance. Taking a sabbatical leave from his position at the Boston Symphony Orchestra, he devoted himself to helping his wife find a way to heal herself with their own psychotronic technology. The couple's backyard workshop was soon filled with decisive activity and mechanical sounds on a daily basis.

Fifteen months of work culminated in the autumn of 1997, with Marena lying on a stretcher beneath a machine that she and William hoped would cure Marena's illness by reinforcing her morphogenetic field. William handed Marena the remote switch, and she activated it. Surrounded by shifting fields of electromagnetic distortion, William was elated as he saw his wife visibly grow stronger and healthier. It was the last time he saw his wife, as the next thing he felt was the sting of a tranquilizer dart impacting into his lower back. When he opened his eyes again, William found himself in a private clinic just outside of Boston. A man from something called "the Aeon Society" was there, telling William that Marena had died an explosion caused by their device, and that his own medical expenses would be paid for. Still in a state of mental shock, William could only

watch as the man left the room, leaving him with only questions and despair where he'd once had a wife and hope. After recovering from his injuries, William left his position at the Boston Symphony Orchestra for good, sold his house and BMW, and left on a year-long ocean cruise around the world. The day of March 23rd, 1998 found William watching the North Pacific from the easy chair in his suite, wondering what had gone wrong with the machine that he and Marena had built and designed. Then William felt his mind explode, and fell to the carpet in shock. After recovering from his strangely intense headaches, William found that the answers to equations and calculations that he'd struggled with now came to him with impossible ease, as both mind and body shook off the effects of aging like dust. He also found himself able to control electronic circuitry with his will alone, and could make small arcs of electricity jump between his outstretched fingers. After watching news reports from around the globe, Williams quickly realized that he himself had become one of these new "paranormal humans" that were shocking the world by simply existing. With his newly-superhuman intellect, he also realized that the man from the Aeon Society had lied to him. The memory had been blurred somewhat from the drug in the tranquilizer dart, but now he could clearly remember two thugs in radiation suits carting Marena, still screaming her lungs out, out of the workshop. William was still at a loss as to how or where he could find allies against the Aeon Society, and was still thinking it over when his cruise liner pulled into Hong Kong. After meeting a Russian woman by the name of Ludmilla Zhdanov and her bizarre, long-tailed friend, he knew that he'd found the allies that he'd need. William Mallory helped to found the Koltsov Academy, and he's been there ever since. He still seeks Grandfather Monkey's counsel about his wife from time to time, but Monkey reassures him that Marena will eventually be returned to him, alive and well. As William can tell when someone's lying to him, he knows that Monkey is speaking the truth as he knows it. And so he works in his lab at the Academy, teaches science classes, and basically helps out where it's needed. He's also lately taken up learning to play the bagpipes, which is unfortunate since William is also a leading candidate for (if not the all-time winner of) the title of World's Worst Bagpipe Player.

Image: William Mallory is an American man of Scottish descent; and is of indeterminate age, medium build, and stands about 5'10" tall. His salt-and-pepper (formerly black) hair is kept cropped in a short buzz-cut, and his blue eyes seem almost unnaturally bright in his otherwise plain-featured face. Despite the fact that Mallory is a nova, his appearance is remarkably ordinary. He almost always shapes his eufiber suits into a white lab coat over an antique tweed suit, complete with worn brown penny-loafer shoes and a rumpled shirt. He never wears a necktie.

Roleplaying Hints: You smile a lot, but only to cover the pain of losing your wife the way you did. Thankfully you've found a new family to take you in until you can find Marena again, and you've sworn never to fail them like you did your wife. Who knows, maybe they would accept Marena too? She's got to be alive, no matter what those Aeon bastards did to her. You're just too young to be a widower. Either way, immersing yourself in your work for the Academy makes you feel useful,

and you've found that you actually like teaching science classes to the Academy's students. And best of all, ever since that young pup Martin joined the Academy, you've finally had enough spare time to take up the bagpipe practice you've always wanted to pursue! Somehow Ludmilla always seems to find even more work to put on your plate after one of your practice sessions, but that's no big deal. It's not like she could be doing that on purpose...could she?

Gear: Laptop computer, cell phone, set of bagpipes. He will carry whatever firearm he deems necessary when in combat, favoring submachine pistols like the Uzi.

Nature: Martyr

Allegiance: Koltsov Academy

Occupation: Teacher, engineer, quantum physicist, psychotronics expert, musician

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Appearance 2, Manipulation 5, Charisma 5

Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Computer 5 (Hacking, Programming, OpNet), Endurance 4, Engineering 5 (Computers, Construction, Electronics), Etiquette 4 (Formal Occasions), Firearms 4, Intimidation 2 (Forbidding Gaze), Investigation 4, Linguistics 5 (English native, Chinese, German, Japanese, Russian), Martial Arts 3, Meditation 3, Melee 3 (Knives), Navigation 2, Perform 5 (Bagpipes, Flute), Rapport 3, Resistance 5, Science 5 (Physics, Psychotronics, Quantum Theory), Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Thought Discipline 5

Backgrounds: Allies 5 (Koltsov Academy staff), Attunement 3, Backing 4 (Koltsov Academy), Contacts 5, Dormancy 3, Eufiber 2, Gadget 5 (the Psychotronic Resonator), Node 4, Reputation 2 (as a crackpot fringe scientist), Resources 4.

Merits and Flaws: Costume Fetish: White lab coat, with an old and much-mended tweed suit (-1), Curiosity (-2), Taint Resistant (5), Totally incompetent at playing the bagpipes* (-3), Annoying habit: incessantly practices his bagpipe playing in his spare time (-1).

* Whenever Mallory attempts to play the bagpipes, treat any successes from his Perform roll as botches, with "10s" counting as two or more botches. Actual botches will count as successes instead. Mallory also cannot use his Mega-Charisma dice to lower the difficulties on his Perform rolls when attempting to play the bagpipes.

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 36, Willpower 10, Taint 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength • (Lifter), Mega-Dexterity ••• (Accuracy, Fast Tasks, Fine Manipulation), Mega-Stamina ••• (Adaptability, Regeneration, Resiliency, Tireless x3), Mega-Perception ••••• (Electromagnetic Vision, Psychic Awareness, Quantum Attunement), Mega-Intelligence ••••• (Computer Prodigy, Discerning Mind, Fast Learner, Eidetic Memory, Engineering Prodigy, Enhanced Memory, Inventive Genius, Mathematical Savant, Scientific Prodigy, Speed Reading, Taint Resistance), Mega-Wits ••••• (Hypercognition, Lie Detector, Prudence, Razor Wit, Synergy), Mega-Manipulation •••• (Clarity, Hypnotic Gaze, The Voice), Mega-Charisma •••• (Dreadful Mien, Pedagogue, Soothe)

Quantum Powers: Aberration Transfer ••••• (Permanency), Absorption: Energy •••••, Cyberkinesis ••••• (Alter Data, Control, Fool, Overload, Reprogram), Deflect/Redirect •••••

(Catch), Disimmunize ●●●●, Disrupt ●●●● (Area), Force Field ●●●● (Wall), Intuition ●●●●, Luck ●●●●, Matter Chameleon ●●●●, Psychic Shield ●●●●, Quantum Bolt (raw nuclear forces, Lethal) ●●●●, Quantum Construct ●●●●, Quantum Conversion: Electricity ●●●●, Quantum Forgery ●●●● (Total Forgery), Quantum Leech ●●●●, Quantum Regeneration ●●●●, Sensory Shield ●●●●, Strobe: Sonic ●●●●** (Area), Stun Attack: Sonic Pulse ●●●●**

** Mallory's Strobe and Stun Attack powers both require him to play a set of bagpipes in order to use them.

Future Developments

As the clock steadily ticks down to the start of the Aberrant War, the Koltsov Academy won't be idle. Presented here for your enjoyment are a few future events in which this reclusive organization will be playing an important part.

- **The End of the People's Revolution:** In 2018, the Three Gorges Dam in China collapses. This entirely natural disaster pushes the People's Republic of China to the breaking point, and beyond. During the next four years, chaos reigns as local administrators attempt to maintain the Communist Party's hold over the populace, only to fail miserably. With the Communist Party rendered impotent and the mysterious disappearance of the Heaven Thunder Triad creating a power vacuum, the time becomes ripe for a loose alliance of rural revolutionaries and university activists (the leaders of whom have been covertly educated, trained, and organized by Ludmilla Zhdanov) to take over China. In 2022 the New Chinese Empire is formed, and China becomes a much safer and more civilized place to live in. The Koltsov Academy begins covertly recruiting the more reasonable Chinese novas, who are relocated to the Deep City. Those Chinese novas deemed unsuitable by the Academy are left to go their own way. The Academy also begins recruiting as many acceptable latent Chinese and Russian novas as they can, even to the point of recruiting the parents of infant latents.

- **Early Days of the NCE:** While most of the actual work of building and maintaining the New Chinese Empire is left to the new baseline government, the Koltsov Academy still works behind the scenes to protect it against outside threats. In addition to keeping groups like Project Utopia, Proteus, the Teragen and DeVries out of China; the Academy also helps enforce the NCE's restrictions on outside trade. This leads the Academy novas into several covert conflicts with elites hired by foreign corporations eager to reap some of China's new economic potential, but the Academy and the NCE prevail.

- **Dark Forebodings:** Ever since 2011, both Ludmilla Zhdanov and Grandfather Monkey have known that a cataclysmic threat to both novakind and baseline humanity has been looming on the horizon of the near future, and that it would most likely take the form of global conflict between the two human subspecies. They have ordered Mallory to secretly begin construction of an extremely powerful psychotronic device that will partially duplicate the telluric effect that cast the Deep City through space and time back in 1930. When activated, Mallory's device will allow Vo Pai-lu to easily create warps capable of bridging interstellar distances. Once a suitable planet in a fairly distant star system has been located, Ludmilla and Grandfather Monkey will have Vo Pai-lu warp the Deep City and everyone in it onto the surface of the new world as soon as possible. Once

there, most of the Koltsov Academy novas will aid the former Deep City's baseline residents in establishing their new colony. Another group of Koltsov Academy novas will remain on Earth, both to aid in the planning of what will become the Chinese Ultimatum and to recruit more baseline colonists from the Asian populace. By the time the Aberrant War ends in 2061, the majority of the Koltsov Academy novas and their baseline relatives will have been long gone from Earth for almost two decades.

- **The Seed of Doomsday:** While the leaders of the Koltsov Academy are planning to eventually leave Earth for good, they are not about to abandon the NCE and baseline humanity wholesale. This is why they have befriended Sophia Rousseau and Max Mercer; in the hope that with the help of Æon and the Aberrants, the NCE can prevent the extinction of baseline humanity. In time, this tentative alliance will form the nucleus of the group that will come up with the final solution to the Aberrant War: the Chinese Ultimatum.

Story Hooks

So, now you have the inside information on the Koltsov Academy. How are you, the Storyteller, going to fit this fairly reclusive group in to your own **Aberrant** chronicle? Here are a few suggestions:

- **Milk Carton Pictures:** One of the characters might have a young relative living somewhere in the Heaven Thunder Triad's territory, who winds up being murdered (possibly along with other immediate family members) by Heaven Thunder Triad thugs. The catch is that the police have no suspects; and there's little or no apparent motive for the murder, aside from HTT thugs "making an example" out of the victims or simply indulging their sadistic urges. If one of the characters has Quantum Attunement and a sufficiently-high rating in Mega-Perception, they might notice faint traces of quantum on the victims' bodies...

- **New Recruits:** The characters are latent novas, covertly rescued from the Heaven Thunder Triad and recruited into the Koltsov Academy's latest class of students. This would be great for players who want to start out with a light-hearted chronicle that can turn serious later on as the characters mature. Think of this chronicle as a cross between Marvel Comics' original *New Mutants* series and one of those "Lost Underground City" stories from the old pulp magazines.

- **The Downfall of Heaven's Thunder:** There are few lengths that people will not go to in defending the lives of their families, especially their children. And as far as the Koltsov Academy is concerned, the nova-rendering operations of the Heaven Thunder Triad is clearly the primary threat to all of them, with Utopia's nova sterilization program running a distant second at best. In order to end the threat posed by the Heaven Thunder Triad, agents of the Koltsov Academy have been laying the groundwork for what would surely be considered one of the greatest mass murders of all time, if the victims weren't all vicious criminals and murderers themselves. But is all but wiping out the Heaven Thunder Triad the right thing to do? Does each and every baseline member of the Heaven Thunder Triad deserve to die like this? What would be the consequences of making the Heaven Thunder Triad suddenly become nothing more than another dark footnote in human history? What

happens if the Nakato Gumi yakuza and/or the Camparelli-Zhukov Megasyndicate tries to move in on all that new territory? Both of those criminal organizations have their own nova-rendering operations too, you know...

• **"You Say You Want A Revolution...":** For an epic **Aberrant** chronicle, there's nothing quite like being involved in the political and social transformation of an entire country, especially one that's as gigantic as China. Characters can be members of the Koltsov Academy, seeking to covertly aid and direct the revolution and overthrow the corrupt Maoist regime. Or they might be members (veteran or recently-erupted) of the PRC's Heavenly Exploding Mandate, who will have to choose sides before a side chooses them. Elites could easily be hired to stack the deck on either side of the battlefields. Members of the Academy-backed revolutionary cells might have erupted recently, and now seek to use their quantum gifts in the service of the New Revolution. Project Utopia is certain to try and stick its long nose into something this interesting, and where Utopia goes, Proteus soon follows. Will the Teragen seek to convert the ranks of the Heavenly Exploding Mandate, which only happens to be the single largest organized force of novas on the planet, to their cause? Will the Aberrants get mixed up in this situation?

Cults

Cult (kült), n. — A religion or religious sect generally considered to be extremist or false, with its followers often living in an unconventional manner under the guidance of an authoritarian, charismatic leader.

— *Dictionary.com*

In the world of **Aberrant**, there are many different people in many different factions that have many different goals. Some of these groups are genuine in their goals. The Utopians, Terats and the Directive are all large groups who have genuine purposes (in general, not counting any international conspiracies). However there are many more groups who aren't.

Cults are small organizations that usually revolve around a single person or idea. Throughout the world there are many of these "cults of personality", but they are particularly abundant in places with higher costs of living and more freedoms, such as the United States of America and other first world countries.

When a cult is first conceived there are a few things that have to be put into place, and a few things that have to be instilled into people. The first thing is the uniting idea. This can really be anything that would cause a person to feel included or give them a sense of family. When a new person comes into the fold, they will be especially attentive to that person, slowly nudging them into the 'right direction' as the cult sees it. The cult will usually encourage the person to separate from their natural family and friends in order to become closer to their new family and friends. Sometimes this will lead to a separation from society in general (leaving a very few who will go out into society and recruit new people). Some cults will also encourage giving up all worldly possessions so that everyone is equal (usually giving it to the cult leader).

When indoctrinating a person into their belief structure they will daily reiterate the cult's core beliefs. They will discourage dissent and engage in mind-numbing exercises such as speaking in tongues and denunciation sessions. It's also very important for them to create an oppressed (Us vs. the world) mentality for the entire cult. Such a mindset encourages the feeling of family and togetherness and discourages people from leaving.

The leader of the cult will often set himself off as a sort of messiah. He will usually make claims that he is God, or that he is the direct link to God(s). The attitude of encouraging people to understand each other currently found in the first world countries is a great aid to a cult's recruiting efforts. The cultists will usually approach potential new recruits in such a way that refusing to give the cult a chance will make the recruits either seem bigoted to each other or feeling like a bigot themselves. Phrases such as "Don't judge us until you know what we are about," and "You never know until you try," are common in the recruitment process. The leader will usually offer some sort of prize to be given to the new recruits if they join the cult and adhere to the cult's philosophies. The prize offered can be anything from assurance of eternal life in Paradise, to social privileges within the cult or even an actual material gift of some sort. The leader can also dispense punishments to cultists who go against the cult's doctrines. These can range from being

forced to perform humiliating acts to being physically beaten or restrained, although expulsion from the cult is both more common and often devastating to a cultist.

It is important to note that while most cults won't employ all of these characteristic practices, every cult will use at least two of them. What practices may be found within any given cult will depend on the cult's philosophies and doctrines, along with the desires of the cult leader.

When creating a cult, either as a Storyteller for your **Aberrant** chronicle or as a player for your would-be cult leader character, you will want to make an outline detailing the basic information about the new cult.

All cults will have a mission of some sort. A mission is a simple sentence that will embody the core of what the cult's real goals are. Most cults will be out to make the leader rich or to bring true enlightenment to the believers. Depending on the cult it may be good to have two mission statements – one being the true goal (to get money) and the other being the public goal, the goal that's meant to attract followers (salvation of the soul).

A cult always has to start somewhere, so it is always a good idea to detail how everything started. This will usually coincide with the most recent part of the leader's life. It should include where he came from, what the leader's motivation for creating the cult was and how he attracted the first members of his cult. It is important to note that even though novas have an important part in the world, baseline cult leaders will still greatly outnumber the nova cult leaders. For purposes of this book we will only deal with nova cult leaders.

Membership is an important part of being in a cult. All cults will have a target personality type that they will try to recruit. Most times potential cult recruits will be people with poor self-images, who tend to find the idea of a tight-knit family appealing. People with low willpower are also common cult recruits, as they tend to be easy to indoctrinate into a cult's particular way of thinking. Many make sure to target certain groups of people to make the indoctrination easier. Satanic cults, for example, will target punk and Goth teenagers who are already familiar with the various concepts relating to the basic beliefs of the cult. This part of the process is much easier for Mega-Social novas. Instead of having to convince people that this or that is correct, people are already attracted to the the Mega-Social nova the cult is centered on. They already *want* to be near the Mega-Social nova. While Social Mega-Attributes only help slightly at lower levels (people like you, but not enough to give their lives up for you), they are nearly irresistible at higher levels, or in the right combinations.

The basic belief structure of the cult should also be taken into account. It's extremely vital to note the "how, what and why" of an important cult belief, so that when a character tries to debunk that belief, the cultists will always have important reasons to support the belief in question. This way it's much easier to gain and keep cultists. All cultists are in some way brainwashed by this doctrine. They are expected to take every piece of the doctrine to heart, embracing it totally and without question. As stated above, various techniques are used to keep these in people's minds in the proper mindset and totally engulfed in the proper beliefs. It may be worthwhile to take the time out to actually write a few possible questions down, and

find answers for them. When trying to answer them, keep in mind the more all-inclusive an answer is, the better it will work. When someone asks something ("What is this for?") you should have a quick answer that should put their mind at ease ("Because God wills it"). Mega-Social novas will usually be able to dodge these questions, or make a mundane or off-subject comment seem like the answer to all of life's questions with relative ease.

A list of the cultists' common, everyday activities is often helpful. These activities will usually include farming, recruiting new members, meditation, and prayer sessions. This part is one of the more important ones as it is going to be what keeps the cultists busy (too busy to really start thinking about the cult objectively), and what keeps the number of cult members up.

Finally you will want to consider who is already allied and opposed to the cult. In the United States people keep a close eye on cults in general, and an even closer one on nova cults in particular. Colleges are almost always opposed to cults of any sort because their campuses are a good recruitment ground for new members. The police will oppose cults because they represent an adherence to a different set of laws that usually do not coincide with common law of the land. The general populace will also have its own opinion about a cult based off of their common perception of what the cult in question represents. One of the main benefits (or hindrances, depending on which side you're on) of having a Mega-Social nova for a cult leader is that he will initially have fewer people opposed to him than a baseline cult leader would. Does he want to go recruiting at a college? A quick, amiable chat with the dean will likely give the cult a standing invitation to the campus. Is he the leader of a cannibal cult? When the police ask questions about the recent disappearances, he can reasonably and believably reassure them that he and his followers had nothing to do with them. In the courtroom it's just as bad (assuming that the cult leader is ever indicted), as the judge will no doubt come to like the cult leader, or the jury might find themselves swayed by his quantum-fueled personality.

Below, we've offered up a few diverse examples of possible nova cults that can be used in the **Aberrant** setting.

Nova Cults

Nova cults are far more dangerous than their baseline equivalents.

The vast majority of baselines won't willingly or knowingly join baseline cults. There just isn't anything in them that says "I want to give all my money to this guy and become his loyal follower/slave". This is why most all baseline cults have recruitment practices that target the "weak" and look like brainwashing. Even with these practices it takes a great deal of effort and time (weeks to months) for their message to sink in and their conversion process to take hold.

That just isn't so for Mega-Social novas. There is an attraction and apparent authenticity found in Mega-Social cult leaders that simply isn't present in delusional baselines. Mega-Social novas really can perform miracles (or at least miraculous things), and even just being near them can feel like a religious experience. Even the most mentally-stable of baselines can be led to wonder if a Mega-Social cult leader shouldn't be worshipped. A nova with the right Mega-Social Attributes and enhancements can convert most of the potential baseline cult

members he meets, and can do so more quickly and with less effort than his baseline counterparts. As most Mega-Social novas routinely get many more successes on their Social rolls than the typical baseline will have Willpower dice to resist, it's easy to see just how convincing a Mega-Social cult leader can be, even without the use of enhancements or quantum powers.

That doesn't mean that every baseline a Mega-Social cult leader encounters will join his cult, but it does mean a nova cult can spread with incredible speed. A Mega-Social cult leader with the Healing power could heal 20 people a day, convince 25 to join her group (i.e. people healed and their families), and in two months she has 1000 worshipers. In a year she has enough votes to swing local elections. Scarier still, groups like law enforcement and the political establishment aren't immune. Dealing with an established cult may involve going up against local laws, local law enforcement, the media, and especially the general population.

It could be argued that after a cult reaches a certain size and digs deeply enough into the fabric of society, it becomes a full-fledged religion. Historically baseline cults have tended to do this, but nova cults tend not to have that option. Over the long term, novas are less stable than baselines because of taint. A cult is a reflection of its founder. With nova cults that will be true even if the leader becomes warped and twisted — physically, mentally, and spiritually — by Taint accumulation. Better still, the whole “cult” environment may not be very healthy for a nova. When everyone around a Mega-Social cult leader tells him that he is God (and *means* it) on a regular basis, wouldn't he start to believe it?

What happens to the cult if and when the leader is removed is up to the Storyteller. Some will drift apart, some cults will stay together, some will have their members suddenly awake as from a bad dream, and others will go mad.

Below, we've offered up a few diverse examples of possible nova cults that can be used in the Aberrant setting.

The de Leon Foundation

Most cults are cults of personality, existing out on the fringes of society, and are often quite poor as well. This is a cult of the wealthy, who worship the Tainted power of their very own captive nova. At its core is the Terat once known as Crumble, who has become trapped in his first — and last — Chrysalis. A time-manipulator who worked with Caroline Fong, Crumble had several aberrations that were causing him difficulties. Like Fong, he went into Chrysalis, and also like her he never came out. Crumble was captured in the same Utopian raid that caught Fong, and transported to the Bahrain facility.

At that point their stories diverged. Dr. Daryl Rogers, the first Utopian researcher to examine this bizarre cocoon, found that animals caged near it grew younger as time passed. Rogers quickly realized the potential of his discovery, and hid the results from his superiors and coworkers. Later he reported that Crumble had “accidentally” died during routine invasive surgery. The task of smuggling Crumble out of Bahrain stymied Rogers, until he realized that Crumble didn't need to breathe and couldn't be poisoned. Crumble left Bahrain in a barrel of toxic waste. Rogers quit Project Utopia, and demonstrated his find to

a very rich, very old benefactor by the name of Horatio de Leon. A week later, Rogers died mysteriously in a car accident, as the consequences of his desertion of Bahrain caught up with him.

Since then several old, prominent, wealthy, and very powerful families in New York State have seen their patriarchs move in together at Horatio de Leon's old mansion. The bedrooms upstairs are barely used, but down in the basement there is an altar upon which Crumble rests in his Chrysalis. At Horatio's personal invitation, many of New York's wealthy and elderly have gathered here in his basement to regain their youth. As they stare into the ever-shifting surface of Crumble's Chrysalis, Horatio and his followers know that they have their own Fountain of Youth, and they will do anything to protect it.

- **Enemies:** Pretty near all the big nova and anti-nova organizations would disapprove of their existence, as might some of their descendants (who won't be getting their inheritances), and the other big moves and shakers of society who aren't immortal.

- **Allies:** This cult has the money to hire elites and employ public defenders. They either control or have considerable influence over many large corporations, small companies, newspapers, politicians, law enforcement organizations, and other segments of baseline society.

- **Goals:** Remain secret. Stay in control.

Methods and Operations

Any interference by player characters or perceived attempts to discover what they are up to will be treated harshly, but indirectly. If the player character works for a corporation pressure will be put on them to have him moved to another city. If the player character is a public defender, then it is likely the mayor will step in and order him to back off. If the danger seems high (for example, if Terats are involved) and/or there doesn't appear to be any other options, elites will be hired through cut-outs to “deal” with the situation.

The Mansion

Horatio de Leon's 19th Century mansion is a massive three-story building, with a large grounds and a two-story brick wall at the edge of the property. There is a swimming pool, but it has been drained. It also has security, including cameras, and there are always six baseline guards (use the stats for normal police officers) on duty. Three trained attack dogs also roam the grounds. None of the guards know that anything is amiss, and they are all contractors who are rotated out to other assignments every two years. Inside the mansion are four servants (one butler and three maids), all of whom are elderly and loyal members of the de Leon Foundation, along with the wealthy cult members.

There are a dozen “guest” bedrooms on the third floor, which are little-used as everyone sleeps in the basement. The second floor has the master bedroom and various entertainment areas. The first floor has the kitchen and a massive ballroom, complete with a dance floor. In the 1950s, during the Red Scare, the basement was converted into a bomb shelter at massive expense. There is a partially-hidden door in the kitchen, from which a stairwell leads down to the basement door, which is an inch-thick plate of steel-reinforced iron. The door is locked from the inside.

The basement walls, including the interior walls, are 16-inch thick concrete slabs covered with wood paneling. There is a communications hub here, complete with full OpNet access. Clean fresh water for the cultists is provided by a well, and there is several years' worth of food. There's even a fully-functional air recycling system installed, although it hasn't seen much use. The diseased heart of the mansion is here. The "altar" room is in the middle of this structure, surrounded by makeshift beds and workspaces. This is where the cultists spend most of their time. For them, just being in the presence of their "god" is addictive. Card tables have been set up with laptop computers and phones so that the wealthy cultists' business can be conducted without having to leave the room. The wires trail openly from there to the communications hub. The door to the bathroom has been removed and mirrors set up so that it is possible to watch Crumble even from in there. For the cultists, heady with their increasing youth, this is paradise.

Dramatis Personae

Crumble

Background: See above.

Image: A twisted and twisting Chrysalis cocoon.

Roleplaying Hints: N/A**.

Gear: N/A**.

Nature: N/A**.

Allegiance: N/A**.

Attributes: Strength N/A**, Dexterity N/A**, Stamina 4, Perception N/A**, Intelligence N/A**, Wits N/A**, Appearance 0, Manipulation N/A**, Charisma 4

Abilities: N/A**.

Backgrounds: Node 4

Merits and Flaws: None.

Quantum 6, Quantum Pool 32, Willpower N/A**, Taint 4 (Baselines in his presence reverse age at a 6:1 ratio*, Baselines in his presence gain a sense of immortality*, Clocks don't work in his presence**), Chrysalis 0.

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina ●●● (Regeneration, Adaptability, Resiliency x2), Mega-Charisma ●●●

Quantum Powers: Armor ●●, Luck ●●●●●†, Temporal Manipulation ●●●●

* The first two aberrations are the reverse of what he had before he went into Chrysalis.

** Crumble's other aberrations and stats aren't relevant inside the cocoon.

† Crumble's Luck still shows up on occasion. He can't control it now, but before he went into Chrysalis he was known for being able to pick the direction time flowed. Technically Crumble exercises no control over his followers...but he still has Mega-Charisma and it is still working. His "followers" really like him, even if he is an alien thing at the moment.

Cult Members

Typical cult members have Resources 5, Influence 3-4, and are at least 70 years old. What industry they are captains of is deliberately left unspecified so it can be ones the player characters are involved with. Suggested industries are: Construction, Banking, News (TV and/or newspapers), etc. A retired Congressman or Governor wouldn't be out of line.

Story Hooks

Elites can be hired to remove people who know too much or who are asking the wrong questions. Player characters working for or with large companies can find themselves in the middle of corporate power struggles as "dying old great-grandfather" suddenly gets more vigorous and decides to start voting those shares himself and exerting more control over the company. A player character nova with quantum awareness might notice 'someone' has been tampering with good old grandpa, his boss, his contact, his friend's grandpa.

If the Teragen ever finds out about Crumble's new 'occupation' there are two possibilities:

1: Tötentanz (or the player characters, if they're elites) gets hired to kill any Terats who try to rescue Crumble.

2: Lots of dead, elderly and wealthy baselines...resulting in condemnation of the Teragen for killing a bunch of weak old men for *no* reason. Without inside information on the de Leon Foundation, it would be tough for an observer to figure out what was really going on after the fact.

Church of the Immaculate Form

Mission Statement: "We are the ultimate beings of expression. Each of us...we have in ourselves the power to make art so beautiful, music so powerful, and pain so wonderful. Each of us in our turn is to give our gifts to the outside world, to let them share in our arts. Now go, my children. Let them share in our arts." -Morbed, Shaper of Men

History

For the past seven years, the Church of the Immaculate Form has been slowly moving into the spotlight of the French high culture scene. Ever since their leader, Morbed, arrived; he has been the inspiration and driving force behind the entire movement.

In 2005, the Church gained access to and legally purchased an old cathedral on the outskirts of Leon, France. This place is home to some 20 regular people, all of whom are fiercely loyal to Morbed. Morbed insists that they are all extremely talented, and that even the least talented have a vast amount of raw potential.

Since its founding the Church has been a haven for poor artists and musicians to congregate and mingle among their own. It is bolstered by the fact that Morbed is a fanatical speaker in favor of a new culture, another renaissance that will soon see the light of day. Some of the artists who hear about the Church and visit decide to live there, much to the dismay of their families. However, as long as the people want to be there, there is nothing that the police can do.

The "Pure Artist Movement", as the Church calls it, has not been without its kinks. There has been much speculation about Morbed's powers and there are rumors floating around that he makes an entirely new kind of art...one of pain and human flesh. This has yet to be proven in the French courts and even the Directive doesn't have any real evidence to support that theory...but the rash of disappearances in the area has raised

some suspicion. No bodies are ever found and for some reason, they can never get a search warrant for the Church. Some suspect that he has some direct control over the local authorities and that he has some secret passages in the building.

As of late, the Church has been doing extremely well financially. The regular donations of their patrons, as well as funding from their starlet Claudette's musical career, has allowed the cult to secure a comfortable lifestyle for themselves. This has pleased Morbed to no end. Soon they plan to expand even further south into France to spread the good word.

Methods and Operations

- **Membership:** Any artists are welcome, but only the ones with some talent are allowed to stay. There is a lot of talent in France, according to Morbed.

- **Activities:** There are regular concerts held by Claudette in the main part of the Church. Every month people will pay a moderate sum and listen to the wonder that is her music. There is a perpetual art show going on inside and around the Church.

- **Allies and Enemies:** The Church has relatively few friends. Most notable among them is the Harvester faction of the Teragen. They view this cult as a movement of taint to purify baselines and to mold them to one's desires. Their only other allies are local artists who respect their work.

Out of all their enemies, Project Utopia is the least dangerous. Utopia's reports of the recent disappearances being linked to the Church remain unconfirmed, as they lack any solid evidence as yet. Nevertheless, the Church remains wary of Utopia, and of the local authorities as well. Perhaps the most dangerous foes of the Church are the parents of the baseline cultists. They feel like Morbed has stolen their children from them, and want nothing more than to stop him for good, before he takes away anyone else's child into his flock.

- **Getting Involved:** To become involved with the Church is easy. Be an artist. After that it becomes harder: you must prove yourself not only to your peers, but to Morbed himself. Once you do that, you are encouraged to stay and to help Morbed to attain the new Renaissance.

Dramatis Personae

Morbed, Shaper of Man

Background: Morbed would have you think that he has been a nova for his entire life. He would also have you think that he was an artist even longer. In actuality he was originally Pierre De Lafou, an unknown in the artist community, who mysteriously disappeared one night after an argument with his then girlfriend. He ran to his studio and quietly erupted when he caught a rat and created an entirely new art form. A few weeks later...his ex-girlfriend was found in a new form. Her face was horribly disfigured in a style remarkably similar to a Picasso painting. Since then she has gone through extensive plastic surgery...but there are some scars which just won't heal...

Image: Morbed's visage is truly horrifying. When most people first see him, they can barely stop themselves from feeling sick. His skin is yellowish and tight, to the point where one can see his bones through it. His face is particularly gruesome, looking almost like that of a decaying corpse. The skin around his mouth has tightened so that his teeth are always showing. Morbed almost always wears a black cloth trenchcoat,

fully buttoned up. The trenchcoat's belt is drawn tightly around his waist, showing all just how thin- emaciated, actually- he really is. His hands are almost like bony claws, as if they are nothing but skin, bone, and tendon.

While he is Mega-Ugly, he can manipulate people with only a few words and with little difficulty. He can also alter a person's form like clay, though he has to actually touch the person to do it.

Roleplaying Hints: You are the ultimate artist. You use visual, mental and even painful means to show your art. You and your children are the ultimate in that department...and your children had better be so. You are a teacher, and you gently guide your children to their potential...you do *not* handle disappointment with them very well though...and some of them have left your flock never to be seen again after particularly bad failures.

Gear: Black trenchcoat

Nature: Architect

Allegiance: Art for art's sake

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Ugliness 5, Manipulation 4, Charisma 4

Abilities: Arts 5 (sculpture), Biz 3, Rapport 3, Style 4

Backgrounds: Allies 2*, Followers 5, Node 2, Resources 4

Merits and Flaws: Costume Fetish: black trenchcoat (-1).

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 7, Taint 6 (Lipless, Dictator, and Sadism).

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength • (Quantum Leap), Mega-Stamina • (Regeneration), Mega-Wits • (Artistic Genius), Mega-Manipulation •• (The Voice), Mega-Ugliness •• (Nightmarish)

Quantum Powers: Armor ••, Claws •, Dominate ••, Form Manipulation ••• (This is a Level 3 power similar to Elemental Anima. He can use any of the alteration techniques listed, although he must actually touch his target to do so.), Shapeshift •••

* These are some of his childhood friends that he has kept with him through out all of this. He works his "art" on them extensively and they act like his body guards. They have the equivalent of: Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Appearance 0, Manipulation 0, Charisma 1, Mega-Strength •, Mega-Stamina •. They aren't the brightest bulbs in the bunch, but they follow Morbed's orders without fail as of yet, and to the letter.

Pierre LaFayette

Background: Pierre was the poster child of the bohemian world. He lived, worked, ate, slept and breathed art, and only saw enough money from it to get by with a small apartment (shared with a roommate) because of it. One day he met a strange fellow calling himself Morbed at a market, where Pierre was trying to sell some paintings so that he could buy food. Morbed entranced him, and even though Pierre couldn't see his face, he could feel a bond forming between them. It was as if the strange man knew *exactly* what Pierre was going through. Soon afterwards he began to frequent Morbed's home, where they became fast friends. Pierre was the first member of Morbed's cult. Now, he is Morbed's second-in-command. And he makes very sure that everyone at the Church knows the grandeur that is Morbed.

Image: Pierre is a skinny, white Frenchman; who wears black trousers, a red and white striped shirt, and a black beret.

Roleplaying Hints: You are the first among Morbed's children. You know just how great his genius truly is. The rest of Morbed's children don't seem to comprehend this, though. You see fit to inform them about Morbed's genius, and to flaunt your seniority over them. You also act much like a preacher; spreading Morbed's word of a pure society where art and music are appreciated, and everything that isn't art is ignored. You make sure that you give leeway to those people who deserve it, but everyone else is fair game.

Gear: Beret

Nature: Follower

Allegiance: Church

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 3, Charisma 2

Abilities: Arts 3 (painting)

Backgrounds: Influence 3, Status 2

Merits and Flaws: Devotion to Morbed (2), Overconfidence (-1). Willpower 3

Claudette

Background: As a child Claudette had a natural talent for music, which her beautiful little hands could manipulate as easily as putty. Once they noticed their daughter's potential, Claudette's parents took out loans, and made arrangements for her to be tutored by the best (and only the best) musical teachers in France. At the tender age of 8, Claudette was ready to be presented to a large audience for her first official production. She was an immediate hit. With her second production, she paid off the loans her parents had taken out for her musical education. With her third production, she had bought a new house for her parents. Claudette's life wasn't all candy, though. She was lonely for someone who could understand her and her art. She had met a few adults who were great musicians in their own right, but they were adults and couldn't understand what went on in *her* mind. At the age of 14 she met Morbed. He looked at her with an understanding that she had never known before. He *knew* everything that went on in her head, and how she felt. After a few chance meetings with him she knew they were destined to be together forever. With her money and contacts they were able to buy a large, old cathedral in the French countryside, and then she ran away from her parents. It is when they caught her leaving with Morbed that she saw the most beautiful, terrible thing in her life...Morbed's new form of art. That night she was so happy that they consummated their relationship. And she has never looked back.

Image: Your beauty is nearly unmatched in baseline society. You like it that way because people will pay to see a baseline performer of near-nova ability. Morbed has worked his art on you and you absolutely adore him for it. Your wheat-colored hair, green eyes and freckled nose are just made to break mens' hearts, but your heart belongs to only one man.

Roleplaying Hints: You are the best musician in France... literally. You don't flaunt this at all, but you know it. Most of your time is spent either creating another masterpiece or with your love. You do your absolute best to make him proud of you, and you have never let him down yet. You are perhaps the

cultist/artist most loved by the Church as a whole (to Pierre's chagrin), but you don't really take advantage of that, because you are a generally nice person...albeit one who hasn't thought objectively about what Morbed has done yet.

Gear: Piano

Nature: Architect

Allegiance: Church

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Appearance 5, Manipulation 2, Charisma 3

Abilities: Arts 5 (music), Etiquette 4, Rapport 4

Backgrounds: Backing 4, Influence 4, Resources 4

Merits and Flaws: Devotion to Morbed (2).

Willpower 4

Story Hooks

- One of the characters has a brother who loves art go missing! He was last seen on a bus in France, going from Paris to Leon.

- Elite characters could get a call from their agency. A group of the cultists/artists' parents have banded together and raised enough money to hire them to investigate Morbed and the Church.

- Project Utopia (or the Teragen) wises up to what Morbed is doing, and sends the characters to stop him and shut down the Church for good.

- One of the characters is an art lover. She hears about a revolutionary new school of art that is simply amazing! She just *has* to visit there, and maybe even drag her philistine buddies along for the ride...

Temple of the Inner Light

What is the Temple of the Inner Light? It's part marketing scam, part New Age religion, part social club, part Ponzi scheme; all backed up by human gullibility, desire, and nova powers. At its core, this cult believes that novas are "the next step". Whether that means the next step in evolution or the next step towards God depends on who you talk to. Baseline recruits are encouraged to think that joining the Temple and advancing in its ranks will make it more likely for them to erupt as novas. The Temple has nine "circles" of membership. The outer circles consist of baseline nova-wannabes, the inner circles consist of novas and ranking baselines, and in between are the baseline devotees. Baseline recruits advance in the Temple by recruiting new members, by marketing the Temple's products, by donating money to the Temple, or by demonstrating their devotion to the Temple in other ways. Baseline members of the inner circles get to spend increasing amounts of time with the Temple novas, which in turn makes it more likely that they will erupt as novas themselves. This scientific fact is what has shielded the Temple from charges of fraud.

Unlike most cults of this nature, this one appears to be the real deal; no fewer than four novas have erupted after joining. After the first few became public, membership took off like a rocket, at last count they had over twenty-five thousand members. Two of the eruptions occurred during special Temple services designed to celebrate the spiritual advancement of the person who then erupted, the most recent one on camera.

However, these homegrown eruptions at the Temple are not “signs of God’s favor” or “someone’s spirit ascending”, but instead are predicted by the Temple’s leader, Marcus. Marcus is a powerful pretercognitive nova, who can sometimes foresee nova eruptions. He then seeks out the latent novas he’s seen in his precognitive visions and attempts to recruit them into the Temple. Once they join, such recruits undergo a special course of Temple indoctrination, due to their “spiritual advancement”. Sometimes Marcus can also foresee if a person’s going to die in the near future. He will then declare the person in question to be “cursed by God” before the entire Temple, expel him or her from the Temple if the person is a Temple member, and will take credit for that person’s death from his followers when it happens.

• **Allies and Enemies:** For two years after the Temple’s founding, none of the large organizations took them seriously. It was commonly assumed that the Temple’s novas had erupted on their own before joining the Temple, and not the other way around as Marcus claimed. After the Temple’s fourth “success”, which was also their second recorded eruption during a Temple service broadcast on the OpNet, all of the large organizations noticed and began to revise their opinions of the Temple. No group is actively hostile to the Temple just yet, but if Marcus really does have a way to induce eruption in baselines then there are potentially world-shaking implications. Both the Directive and Project Utopia are quietly investigating the Temple, and the Teragen has approached Marcus. The Church of Michael Archangel is quietly going nuts over the whole situation, and has already publicly denounced the Temple.

Dramatis Personae

Nova membership consists of 6 members counting Marcus. Relationships between them are pretty cordial.

Marcus

Background: Originally Joe Markson was a small time aviation instructor. He erupted when he was struck by lightning while giving a test flight. Before the plane hit the ground he saw everything, and knew everything. He saw at last that his ex-wife had left him because he was an alcoholic. He saw what a waste his life had been. And he saw the future and what he interpreted as God’s plans for him. After the plane hit he healed himself, his student, sold everything he owned and traveled to Phoenix where he knew he would meet Cassandra.

Image: Marcus appears to be a fairly average-looking 50 year old Caucasian man with black hair, that has faded to silver in his beard. In person his personality hits like a hammer. There is fire in his eyes and in his belly. Even over the OpNet his sermons are magnetic, and in person it is like listening to the voice of God.

Roleplaying Hints: You KNOW! God has personally revealed to you what your role is to be. It is your holy duty to lead everyone to the next step, where novas commune with God and baselines follow until such time that they are spiritually evolved enough to erupt themselves. Although you are part of this world, you are not “of” this world. You have a duty to your flock, especially your spiritually advanced nova flock, to your church, and most of all, to the future. Violence is generally unnecessary and counter productive.

Theme: The revealing holy light

Gear: Pilot’s license

Nature: Visionary

Allegiance: Temple of the Inner Light

Occupation: Cult Leader

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 4, Charisma 5

Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Command 2, Drive 1, Diplomacy 2, Endurance 3, Etiquette 2, Gambling 1, Instruction 2, Intimidation 1, Linguistics 1 (English native, Spanish), Martial Arts 2; Medicine 1, Meditation 1, Navigation 1, Perform 5, Pilot 2, Rapport 4, Resistance 3, Style 1, Subterfuge 2

Backgrounds: Allies 5 (the other cult novas), Backing 5, Eufiber 5, Followers 5, Influence 4, Node 2, Resources 5

Merits and Flaws: None.

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 9, Taint 3

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina •• (Hardbody), Mega-Perception ••• (Electromagnetic Vision, Quantum Awareness), Mega-Manipulation •• (The Voice, Persuader), Mega-Charisma •••• (Commanding Presence, Inspiration)

Quantum Powers: Bioluminescence •••, Flight ••, Force Field •••, Healing ••, Intuition ••, Pretercognition ••••, Psychic Shield ••••

Cassandra “Cassy” Jackson

Background: Cassandra Jackson was an Olympic Decathlon hopeful, before injuring her right knee badly enough to disqualify her from competing. After that, she found out that there really wasn’t much of a market for failed, nearly crippled athletes. After several years of hard luck she was seriously considering prostitution when Marcus found her. He had just erupted and when he talked to her about visions, churches, prayers, and all that she thought he was nuts. But he was a nova and if he wanted to create a church and give her a job based on her potential that was better than anything else she had going.

Then she prayed with him and erupted. He had been right about everything. Instead of being a failure at everything, she was now successful at everything. She was also his first recruit.

If Marcus is the heart and soul of the Temple, Cassy is its head. She runs and organizes most of the mundane Temple activities. She does the hiring of baselines, mostly from Temple followers but not always.

Image: Cassy appears to be a very attractive black woman in her mid twenties.

Roleplaying Hints: Marcus is right, and even has a direct line to God, but his organizational abilities are limited. You are the one who really makes things happen around here. This is your Olympics. You measure yourself in how smoothly everything runs, and in the upward curves on the graphs you make of the Temple’s membership and finances.

Gear: Laptop, Cell phone

Nature: Architect

Allegiance: Temple of the Inner Light

Occupation: Cult Leader (Head of Personnel).

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Appearance 4, Manipulation 4, Charisma 4

Abilities: 3 dots in each ability; Linguistic specialties are English native, French, German, and Spanish.

Backgrounds: Allies 5 (the other cult novas), Backing 5, Eufiber 5, Followers 5, Resources 4

Merits and Flaws: None.

Quantum 1, Quantum Pool 22, Willpower 10, Taint 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength • (Quantum Leap), Mega-Stamina • (Regeneration), Mega-Dexterity • (Fast Tasks), Mega-Perception • (That Creepy Feeling), Mega-Intelligence • (Administrative Prodigy, Tactical Prodigy), Mega-Wits • (Lie Detector), Mega-Appearance • (Mirroring), Mega-Manipulation • (Persuader), Mega-Charisma • (Soothe)

Quantum Powers: None.

Sharon Greenstone

Background: Sharon is both the most powerful and the most unstable of the Temple novas. She can control nature and even life itself. She can alter the weather, control the winds, throw lightning, call and control animals or insects, heal with a touch, or cause a person's own "life force" to slowly drain away. She was the one who prevented Noel's eruption from injuring anyone. She is also the only Temple nova whose Social Mega-Attributes work through video broadcasts. She is a magnet for men and two thirds of the Temple's followers are male. She is also high strung, something of a camera hog, can barely read or write, and has affairs with Temple followers. She finds healing someone while on camera to be an act that affirms her beliefs.

Before her eruption Sharon was a friendless 52 year old housewife with an abusive husband. She had also been a frump her entire life, and her husband repeatedly told her that she was nothing and nobody. She erupted while he was beating her. She beat him to almost to death, healed his injuries, and then watched him die very slowly over the next few days of some wasting sickness. Marcus showed up after her eruption and helped her and the authorities deal with her husband's sickness and death. Note Sharon does not casually use her "curse of nature" (her Poison power) power and she is not publicly known to have it. She leaves a trail of brokenhearted lovers, but not dead ones.

Image: Sharon is a drop dead gorgeous woman of indeterminate (but young) age. She is now a green eyed red head.

Roleplaying Hints: You have discovered the spotlight, and you love it. Granted, Marcus is scary in his insight and knowledge, but that doesn't matter. What is important is that proper attention must be paid to you. The camera must capture you correctly. Various men must court you to demonstrate that you are both beautiful and a person of importance. The ultimate rush is using your powers on camera, especially healing. Healing shows God's favor and attention, and it focuses everyone else's attention on you as well, especially in that new robe with the low neckline.

Gear: None

Nature: Gallant

Allegiance: Temple of the Inner Light

Occupation: Cult Leader

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Perception 5, Intelligence 2, Wits 5, Appearance 5, Manipulation 2, Charisma 5

Abilities: Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Drive 1, Endurance 3, Interrogation 1, Intimidation 3, Martial Arts 2, Meditation 2, Perform 3, Rapport 2, Resistance 3, Style 3, Subterfuge 2

Backgrounds: Allies 5 (the other cult novas), Backing 5, Eufiber 5, Followers 5, Node 3, Resources 4

Merits and Flaws: Uneducated (-5).

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 5, Taint 4 (Lusty)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength • (Crush, Lifter), Mega-Dexterity ••• (Physical Prodigy), Mega-Stamina ••• (Regeneration, Resiliency), Mega-Perception • (Hyperenhanced Hearing), Mega-Wits • (Quickness), Mega-Appearance •••• (Almost Live, Seductive Looks)

Quantum Powers: Animal Mastery •••, Force Field •• (wall of wind), Healing •••, Poison ••• (Aggravated), Psychic Shield ••, Quantum Bolt •••• (Lethal, lightning bolt), Telekinesis ••• (wind control), Weather Control •••• (Alter Temperature, Control Weather, Fog, Windriding)

Nate "Stone Face" Clayton

Background: The only child of a lawyer and an artist, Nate's unstable mother killed herself when he was six. His father was not supportive of him becoming an artist, and put a great deal of pressure on him to become a lawyer.

Nate was the first nova to erupt on camera during a broadcast Temple service. Having foreseen Nate's eruption, Marcus had ordered his followers to blanket a specific college dorm building with recruitment fliers for the Temple. Nate happened to reside in that dorm, and attended a Temple service with some friends as a lark. During the broadcast service, Marcus pointed Nate out to everyone as being "especially evolved". Nate erupted two weeks later while attending another broadcast Temple service. Nate's hair and irises changed from black to granite gray during his eruption. Since then, he has dropped out of college to pursue his career in sculpting. Every now and then Nate's very strong-willed father visits him, in order to convince him to return to college and the pre-law program.

Nate's eruption gave him the power to turn himself into animate stone, and to reshape stone at will. He's rapidly becoming a world-renowned sculptor, specializing in crafting stone faces and busts of famous people. His nova abilities allow him to see not only what's inside people's bodies, but their psyches as well. He uses this insight in making his sculptures, which are noted for their uncannily accurate reflection of his subjects' personalities as well as their appearance.

Image: Nate is youthful 21 year old Hispanic man with dark gray hair and eyes.

Roleplaying Hints: You lived under your father's shadow your entire life, and now you have finally come into your own. Marcus is a true visionary, and everything about your new path rings true. Not only did Marcus help you erupt(!), but even the nature of your eruption shows that art and religion are your true callings. Art and religion are far more rewarding, in every way, than law ever was or ever would be. You will never be the carbon copy of your father that he wanted. You are sorry if that causes him pain, and if you remind him of your mom. But all you have to do is look in the mirror or at any of the faces you have created since your eruption to know that Marcus has the right of it.

Gear: Sketch Pad, Pencils

Nature: Follower

Allegiance: Temple of the Inner Light

Occupation: Artist, Cult Leader

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 5, Appearance 2, Manipulation 2, Charisma 2

Abilities: Academics 3, Arts 4 (sculpting), Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 1, Computer 1, Drive 1, Endurance 3, Linguistics 1 (English native, Spanish), Melee 3, Might 3, Perform 2, Resistance 3, Style 1, Subterfuge 1, Weave 1

Backgrounds: Allies 5 (the other cult novas), Backing 4, Eufiber 4, Node 1, Resources 4

Merits and Flaws: None.

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 4, Taint 3

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength • (Lifter), Mega-Stamina ••• (Hardbody), Mega-Perception • (High-End Electromagnetic Scan), Mega-Wits •• (Artistic Genius, Natural Empath)

Quantum Powers: Bodymorph: Stone ••• (Density Increase x2, 1 dot of Armor), Elemental Mastery: Stone • (Shaping)

Lee Cardman

Background: The nova who now calls himself “Lee Cardman” was a high school physics teacher who was grading papers on his computer one night, when his house caught on fire. His eruption allowed him to escape the burning house though the electrical system of his computer, and from there into the local power grid. After materializing in an abandoned gas station, Lee quickly realized that he had become a nova. Having gained superhuman intelligence, he also realized a way to escape from his rather dull prior existence as a baseline. Keeping his eruption a secret; Lee faked his own death, abandoned his teaching job and assumed a new identity. He then moved to another city, where he became a day trader. Several months and millions of dollars later, he repeated the process again, creating his present identity of the multimillionaire “Lee Cardman” in another city.

By coincidence (?), Marcus chose to set up his Temple only a few miles away from Lee’s new mansion. Figuring that he’d best check out this nova cult, Lee investigated the Temple from a distance with his cyberkinetic powers, and even dived down to pose as a baseline while attending a Temple service. At first, the Temple looked like nothing more than a social club for novas that was funded by gullible baselines. As far as Lee was concerned, saying that “novas are the next step (in evolution)” seemed to be just sugar-coating the truth for the masses. It wasn’t wrong, but it wasn’t especially interesting to Lee. Activities such as healing the sick or pandering to the masses weren’t of any interest to him either.

However, the notion that Marcus was establishing a new way for novas and baselines to interact with each other was interesting to Lee. Investigating the Temple more closely, Lee’s interest in the Temple began to increase. The women among the Temple’s novas (specifically Sharon) were hot, but what really drew Lee’s interest was that there really seemed to be something to Marcus’ claim of being able to help baselines erupt as novas. Lee came out of dormancy during a Temple service, and sensed that the Temple novas weren’t lying. Witnessing Nate Clayton’s eruption during a later Temple service finally

convinced Lee to join the Temple. Whatever it is that Marcus is doing, Lee wants a part of it.

Image: Lee is a 32 year old nondescript Caucasian man. For a nova he looks a great deal like a baseline.

Roleplaying Hints: Stay quiet. You see everything coming. Your accelerated mind means very few people are your mental equal, and even the few that are find it impossible to surprise you. Most conversations aren’t worth the bother. You don’t believe in any of the religious trappings of the Temple, but conveying that would cause problems so you don’t mention it. Marcus is an idiot, one of those poor deluded types who insist on coloring their gifts with religion, but that doesn’t really matter. Experience has taught you the vast majority of people are far more like Marcus than like you. No matter how “wrong” Marcus is, as the saying goes, “if it’s stupid but it works then it isn’t stupid.”

Any way you view it, the Temple is turning out to be a very good thing. On one level it’s a social club for novas, funded by baselines. Your fellow novas may not be your intellectual peers, but it is nice being with them. On another level it’s a lesson in how baselines and novas can get along. Marcus isn’t kidding when he talks about “the new order”. On yet another level Marcus appears to be able to cause eruptions. That’s significant and deserves a lot more study.

Gear: Laptop computer

Nature: Analyst

Allegiance: Temple of the Inner Light

Occupation: Scientist, Cult Leader

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 3, Appearance 2, Manipulation 4, Charisma 3

Abilities: Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Biz 3, Drive 1, Endurance 3, Instruction 2, Navigation 2, Perform 2, Pilot 1, Resistance 3, Stealth 1, Style 1, Subterfuge 3, Tactics 2, All Intelligence skills at 3 dots; Linguistic specialties are English native, Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish.

Backgrounds: Allies 5 (the other cult novas), Backing 4, Cipher 5, Dormancy 3, Eufiber 5, Influence 3, Node 1, Resources 5

Merits and Flaws: None.

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 7, Taint 0

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Perception ••• (Quantum Awareness), Mega-Intelligence ••• (Analyze Weakness, Fast Learner, Financial Prodigy, Investigative Prodigy, Scientific Prodigy), Mega-Wits ••• (Lie Detector)

Quantum Powers: Cyberkinesis ••• (Alter Data, Overload, Reprogram), Invulnerability: Electricity ••, Premonition •••, Transmit •••• (electrical power lines)

Noel Colton

Background: Tiffany Colton became a single, unwed mother at the age of 16. Determined to keep her daughter, by working two jobs and taking state assistance Tiffany was barely able to keep food on her table. With her mother having to work two jobs and moving to a new apartment on a regular basis, little Noel grew up emotionally distanced from her mother. Unknown to either of them, Marcus had foreseen that Noel would erupt as a nova in one of his precognitive visions. Marcus ordered Cassandra to offer Tiffany a job working for the Temple’s administrative office. Faced with the prospect of finally being

able to earn a very healthy salary, Tiffany eagerly accepted Cassandra's offer. Mother and daughter joined the Temple together that very same day.

Two months after joining the Temple, Noel became the second nova to erupt on camera during a broadcast Temple service, and is the newest member of the inner circle of the Temple. Noel's eruption gave her control over ice, which is what she felt that her pre-eruption life had been made up of. The other Temple novas have made an effort to make their youngest member feel welcome. Noel feels that the Temple is the first real home that she has ever had.

Image: Noel is a pretty 12 year old girl with ice blue eyes and hair.

Roleplaying Hints: Life's been tough. Every other year you've been the new kid on the block, and everyone always stared aghast at the poor little almost-homeless girl with the bad clothes trying to fit in. Mom's new job seemed like a godsend but you knew that it was too good to be true. Sure, everyone seemed friendly on the surface; but in a few months Mom would be let go, fired, or whatever, and the two of you would be out on the street again. Worse, Marcus' claims of "special plans" and "spiritual evolution" were way too good to be true and you'd figured he was getting ready to play "daddy".

And then "bang". Marcus called on God to make you erupt, God followed suit, and that redheaded tramp used her power to stop you from freezing everyone. For once, you were on the inside. One of the rich, popular kids. One of the kids with a family who cares about them. You even have blue hair to tell everyone who and what you are. A part of you is waiting for it to end, but the rest of you is either enjoying the feeling, or trying to make sure it never does end.

Gear: None

Nature: Survivor

Allegiance: Temple of the Inner Light

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Appearance 4, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Academics 2, Arts 1, Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Bureaucracy 2, Endurance 3, Legerdemain 1, Linguistics 1 (English native, Spanish), Perform 2, Rapport 1, Resistance 3, Ride 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 2, Style 2, Subterfuge 2, Survival 1

Backgrounds: Allies 5 (the other cult novas), Backing 3, Eufiber 3, Resources 3

Merits and Flaws: Child (-4).

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 3, Taint 4 (ice blue hair)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina • (Adaptability)

Quantum Powers: Elemental Mastery: Ice ••••• (Storm, Movement, Imprison, Shield, Blast)

Story Hooks

What's the problem? The novas of the Temple of the Inner Light are fairly clean, they don't seem to be abusing either their baseline followers or their nova powers...in short, they are fairly decent people. It's reasonable to ask "What's the problem here?"

The problem with the Temple of the Inner Light is this: what effect will it have on society, and can the various factions tolerate the Temple's existence? The India Syndrome is bad enough in the small villages of India. It is an exaggeration to say that any baseline who attends a Temple service will be converted and join, but a good percentage of them will. There are a lot of ordinary people out there with average or below-average willpower, and Marcus and his crew really are performing "miracles" and healing the sick.

To put the question of abuse into perspective; there isn't much point in robbing a bank when you can get far more money legally. This same logic applies to just about any abuse of power imaginable. Wilt Chamberlain managed to sleep with 20,000 women, and he didn't have Social Mega-Attributes.

Is the social structure of the Temple going to be the model for how baselines and novas will interact with each other in the future? Will other novas join the Temple? Will the characters join? Will the characters try to shut down the Temple? Everything Marcus and his followers are doing is legal, but does that matter? How are the baseline politicians going to react when the ranks of the Temple's followers start swelling into the hundreds of thousands? What if Marcus ordered all of those followers to vote for or against someone? What will Project Utopia and the Teragen make of all this? The Temple of the Inner Light has the potential to spread, and that doesn't even deal with the issue of whether or not Marcus can really make baselines erupt as novas.

Independent characters might visit the Temple simply to see for themselves what is going on there, and novas from the other factions may be sent to investigate by their superiors. Marcus will welcome any and all novas who visit the Temple of the Inner Light, and will unabashedly try to convert them. With his Precognition, it's quite likely that Marcus will foresee any such visitors coming, and make appropriate arrangements.

CHAPTER TWO:

SOCIAL ENGINEERING

One of the joys of playing a Mega-Social nova is the rush of control. Novas of social acumen grace the floor with their beauty, charm or their underhanded ploys. Always ready to dazzle the baselines and less socially gifted novas, Mega-Social novas excel at manipulating the casual observer's perceptions or "People Hacking" as one technologically savvy reporter decried it. Storyteller's may find this type of nova a danger that can sidetrack their finely tuned stories and Mega-Social players are often frustrated at the seeming lack of impact their nova is having on the media and their fan base in the social arena. There exist techniques and guidelines that can allow both Storytellers and Players to enjoy the Social game of one-upmanship in the world of **Aberrant**.

People Hacking 101 (Friend or Foe?)

Mega-Social novas are in a unique position to acquire many low-level followers or contacts through role-playing and normal character interaction. This can both add to and hinder the gaming experience. By defining the types of people a Mega-Social nova may attract and identifying their strengths and weaknesses, both Storytellers and Players can negotiate the best way to handle these followers in play.

There are generally three types of followers that a social nova can attract without purchasing the Followers Background (though until the background is either purchased or increased, these followers are only temporary), the fan, the lover and the victim. The fan will do anything to be close to the Mega-Social nova of their dreams. Unfortunately, the fan's perception of the nova rarely matches the reality. Ironically, it is the outwardly attractive nova gifted with Mega-Appearance who most often attracts this sort of follower. The lover believes that only that special nova can understand them and fulfill their needs. This sort of follower can usually only be maintained by a nova gifted with Mega-Charisma, though once the lackey's needs are known they are often the easiest to keep happy and maintain, as long as the nova cares to. The victim is a lackey through connivance or trickery, and rarely willing to help to the nova. Through blackmail – financial, emotional, or political – the nova controls and keeps the victim in line.

Fans

"Sure I can help you... are you free for dinner tonight?"

Fans, those one in a dozen baselines that think it would be, "so amazing" if they had a picture of you standing beside them. These casual lackeys will do what ever it takes to get a look or a

smile from the nova of their dreams. If the nova thinks the Fan is equally cool or nova worthy, the Fan will faun all over their idol. Of limited value, the Fan is most useful for simple low risk requests. If the nova needs a competent and informed follower, look elsewhere.

Lovers

"Only you truly understand me!"

Lovers are driven to feel wanted and special; these followers delve into the inner pathos and passions of the nova and try to understand the nova's true self. Once they gain the ear of that special nova, they are determined to prove their worth, and as some Lovers do point out, how the nova could improve. Devoted and true, best describes this follower, but they still mean very little to their nova, at least until they prove their worth.

Victims

"If I disobey, she will ruin me."

Victims, spend most of their time wondering, "What did I do to deserve this?" Victims are those unique followers that hate the nova almost as much as they hate themselves. Trapped between their crime and the nova's desires, the Victim strives to free themselves from the nova's machinations. As long as the nova has clear and precise instructions for the victim they rarely dare to disobey. As soon as the nova's back is turned, however, they will either twist or ignore the instructions to the greatest extent they believe they can get away with.

So You Have a Follower...

...what are you gonna do?

The Number One Fan, this follower may worship the ground you hover-over, but what will they do, and how might they hurt you? Most followers if given a chance to help the nova, depending on their relationship, will do it. What may make the difference between true help and a major hindrance will depend on three factors, luck, insight, and intention.

Not all followers want the best for their nova. Most Victims and some Lovers will want the nova to fall into hardship: either to be able to come to the nova's rescue, or just to see the nova suffer for a change. If ever a player starts to depend on one of their followers, that is the cue for the Storyteller to have the follower start demanding payback for all the favors the nova ever asked of them. Storytellers need to remember that followers are people with very real feelings, and though they might not be able to directly harm or threaten most novas, they can easily unite with forces that can.

Some followers know their patron nova so well, that they can take the initiative and gather a little information without being asked, others, well they try, but when they turn up with some hot

news, it might be about a band or political group that has nothing to do with the nova's current situation, or might just be wrong. Followers lacking the cognitive or manipulative abilities of a nova, are very easy to fool in comparison an enemy of the nova would be foolish not to use that weakness to its fullest.

For example, Lucian is a Mega-Social nova, who has been hearing rumors that Omni and his gang of zealots are moving into his neighborhood. Deciding that his presence would be too easy to detect at one of Omni's rallies he asks one of his lackeys to attend in his stead. This set-up is perfect for the corruption or misleading of a follower. Depending on Omni's abilities the follower could be converted or completely misinformed. A vigilant player will arrange things to reduce such subversion or at least to keep an eye on it. Imagine Lucian's horror when he discovers that Omni already has members in Lucian's gang.

Not all followers are lucky enough to even be useful to their nova all of the time. For example, that bartender that always knows your favorite drink, and will mention who he saw coming through the bar today, might not have noticed when Count Orzaiz walked in, since he was busy getting a drink for a customer at the other end of the bar.

So You Have a Nova...

...what will you do for him?

The three different followers described above each serve their nova differently; in the **Aberrant** world many opportunities can and do arise.

The Fan in a conflict of novas will only stick themselves in the way of conflict when they believe their favorite nova can protect them. All other risks are too risky for any payoff. What it boils down to is that the Fan will only stand in for their patron.

The Lover in a conflict of novas will risk life and limb for a special word or gesture from their favored nova, even if the nova in question won't know about it until they return battered and bruised with their tale. This does not mean they will necessarily fight a lost cause, only that they will take greater calculated risks.

The Victim in a conflict of novas will turn on the nova overlord if they believe that by doing so will remove any hold the nova has on their life. If the controlling nova is cruel enough, the Victim may do it just to make the nova feel a portion of the pain the Victim has suffered.

You Can Never Have Too Many Sycophants

In **Adventure!**, the premise of possessing hundreds of contacts or followers is introduced; the following section discusses how such background traits can be incorporated into **Aberrant**.

It is suggested that level 6 and higher Followers Backgrounds be limited to 5 + the Highest Mega-Social Trait; while the higher Background can be acquired through story occurrences, it is very difficult to maintain without the Mega-Attributes to support. For example, two Mega-Social novas – Lucian and Omni – have a Followers Background of 6. Lucian is a Mega-Charismatic Nova so his player explains to the Storyteller that his followers are inspired by his leadership and some intangible connection he seems to maintain with them all. Omni is a Mega-Manipulative nova that keeps all of his followers in line with promises of power and blackmail. Both have the Mega-Traits to support their

Followers, but each attracts a different breed of follower by their very natures. Lucian has more Fans and Lovers, while Omni attracts many Victims and some Fans.

The Idol's Call

Idols attract many Fans and many Lovers, and very few Victims, though any number of the Lovers and Fans can become Victims in the hands of a ruthless Idol. An Idol's attractiveness blinds many followers to their words and actions, but the seductive or awesome glory of their looks convince many followers to stay in their presence. Most Victims are too self-absorbed to share their pathos with an Idol, Fans on the other-hand, only want to stare and bask in the nova's aura. It is the Lover that is most valued by Idols. The Lover follower actually tries to find the inner person in their Idol, and though many are blinded by the Idols outer appearance, this effort alone often endears them to their nova.

The Horror's Aura

Squids (those novas with the flip-side of the Mega-Attractive Trait) attract Fans and Victims. Many of the Fans, are fascinated with the pure ugliness of the nova, in an almost morose manner. Victims on the other hand, do not so much seek out the Mega-Ugly nova, as they are either drawn or trapped by the canny horror.

The Charmer's Lure

Charmers attract Lovers and Fans equally, many of the Charmer's followers have a powerful desire to get to know the nova better, and the Charmer's very nature makes their company almost addictive. Fans are always amazed at how enjoyable the nova is in person, and the few Victims the Charmer may acquire, can become Lovers or Fans with sufficient time and effort.

The Grifter's Game

Grifters attract Fans and Victims. The ease at which the Grifter collects Victims is the primary reason all other types of followers are often edged out, though the Fans are still prevalent. The followers that know what the Grifter does love to witness the nova in action. It is the greatest weakness of a Grifter that their followers love to see them manipulating others (perhaps because, it can mean the Grifter is NOT manipulating them).

Adversarial Backgrounds

Contrary to what some people believe, eruption as a nova has never meant enjoying a trouble-free life. Aside from the normal problems that might carry over from a nova's pre-eruption life, there's a virtual smorgasbord of entirely new problems with which a nova might find herself burdened. After all, would the Ancient Mariner have been quite as distinctive a character without the dead albatross hanging from his neck that he couldn't remove? For those players and Storytellers who might be interested, we present a new variety of entirely optional storytelling tools to help reflect these special problems.

Putting on the Albatross

Adversarial Backgrounds are essentially negative backgrounds in every sense of the term. Instead of representing the various benefits a player character might enjoy, these represent various troublesome situations that will make the player character's life more difficult. As such, they can easily be abused to create twinkled-out characters (whose "problems" don't hinder them very much) if a Storyteller isn't careful. For that reason, we strongly suggest that the Storyteller maintain total control over the use of adversarial backgrounds if she decides to allow them in her **Aberrant** chronicle. A player cannot apply Adversarial Backgrounds to his character without the Storyteller's approval. Likewise, a Storyteller should never apply Adversarial Backgrounds to a player character if the player in question doesn't want them. Just as with ordinary Backgrounds, the Storyteller and the player must work together to determine whether a character should have any of these problems and for what reasons. That way, both abuses of the game system and pointlessly absurd situations can be avoided. And as always, the Storyteller has the final say on the matter.

In the interests of keeping one's game running smoothly, we recommend that characters in a typical **Aberrant** chronicle (those at the 30 nova point level) should be limited to having no more than seven dots of Adversarial Backgrounds at any one time. Characters in higher-powered chronicles may have more dots at the Storyteller's discretion, but ten dots tends to be the maximum a character can have before they begin to bog down the game. If the system of Merits and Flaws (as presented in the **Aberrant Player's Guide**) is used, each dot of an Adversarial Background might (or might not) also be counted as 1 point of Flaws at the Storyteller's discretion. Again, Storytellers and players are encouraged to discuss these matters beforehand, so that these game mechanics can be adjusted to suit their particular tastes.

There are two ways that the Storyteller can apply dots of Adversarial Backgrounds to a player character. The first way is to apply them during the character creation process, where each dot provides the character with an extra bonus point. The second way is to apply them in the course of play, as part of the logical consequences of the character's actions and/or developing circumstances. In that latter option, the Storyteller might apply dots of an Adversarial Background to simulate the extremely rapid development some novas might exhibit. In this case, the Adversarial Background would provide a pool of "loaned" experience points equal to the total experience point cost of a Background of the same rating. While this might seem like munchkin-style twinkery at first, it's actually more akin to loan-

sharking, with the Storyteller acting as the loan shark. See **Getting Rid of the Albatross** (listed below) for the details.

Getting Rid of the Albatross

Sooner or later, an Adversarial Background will become enough of a nuisance that a player will want to see about reducing his character's rating. Doing so is no easy task, and can provide some excellent role-playing situations for everyone involved in the chronicle. First off, lowering an Adversarial Background by 1 dot costs 3 times the next lower rating in experience points. For example, reducing a 4 dot Adversarial Background to 3 dots would cost a total of 9 experience points. Eliminating the last dot of an Adversarial Background costs 3 experience points. Also, the player should put forth a great deal of better-than-average role-playing effort in order to reflect his character's struggle to rid himself of the problem represented by the Adversarial Background. Mediocre role-playing simply will not do in this situation.

Remember that tidbit about how a player character could be assigned dots of an Adversarial Background in order to reflect extremely rapid development? Here's how it works. The Storyteller assigns the player character a given number of dots of an appropriate Adversarial Background. In return for this, the player receives a pool of "loaned" experience points equivalent to the experience cost of a Background at the same dot rating, which can then be spent on character development. (Using the "loaned" experience points to reduce the rating of the assigned Adversarial Background that those points came from in the first place is just a silly waste of everyone's time, and should be prohibited by the Storyteller. It's also possible for a player to buy off an existing Adversarial Background in this manner, but at the cost of gaining a different Adversarial Background at a rating equal to 150% of the experience point value of the original Adversarial Background.) As an Adversarial Background is 50% more expensive than a Background in terms of experience point costs, the player is essentially paying a much higher price for his character's accelerated development than a character who develops at the normal rate of speed.

Adversarial Background Enhancements

As novas are by definition larger than life, it only makes sense that they can sometimes have larger than life problems as well. A few of these Adversarial Backgrounds possess Background Enhancements, which elevate these role-playing burdens into realms of trouble which others can only have nightmares about. Like the Background Enhancements presented in **Adventure!**, these special problems are only available to characters with five dots of an Adversarial Background. They effectively count as a sixth dot of an Adversarial Background, and cost 18 experience points to get rid of. Not all Adversarial Backgrounds can have Background Enhancements, but new ones can be created with Storyteller approval. Adversarial Background Enhancements are listed with their respective Adversarial Backgrounds.

Adversarial Background: Fan Club/Cult

As they have for centuries, ordinary people often spend considerable time trying to find some way to give their otherwise-

empty lives a little meaning. While most of them choose the ordinary means of profession, political activism or religion to fulfill this need, others (usually those who have a streak of fanaticism or are otherwise mentally disturbed) choose a particular famous person to adore and idolize. In the face of ridicule from those who don't share their opinions and beliefs, these people tend to organize themselves into fan clubs or outright cults that offer adoration and/or actual worship to the figure in question. Ironically enough, these two types of organizations tend to become more and more difficult to distinguish from each other as the fervor of their members increases over time. And in the world of **Aberrant**, very few people are as likely to be idolized by this kind of people as a nova...

A nova with this adversarial background has been idolized without her consent by a group of these fanatical baselines. These people simply will not cease their worship and/or idolization of your character, despite the fact that she wants nothing at all to do with them. If your character scorns them, they will simply think that she's testing their devotion to her, and will redouble their efforts to prove it. If she tries to escape from them, they'll do their best to track her down. They'll do their best to find out everything they can about their unwilling idol, and will gladly share that information with anyone who asks. The Divisians (as seen in **Aberrant: Year One**, pg. 42) are a particularly appropriate example of a group represented by this adversarial background. While this former fan club has become a bona-fide cult worshipping Divis Mal, more than likely the leader of the Teragen regards them as nothing more than irritating pests. It's interesting to note that this particular cult is still rumored to be active in the **Trinity Era** (see **Hidden Agendas**, pg. 14) – once it gets started, a cult is very difficult to get rid of.

One very important thing to note is that these people provide no benefits whatsoever to the nova that they idolize. They will cause your character nothing but trouble – that's what this adversarial background has been designed to reflect. It's barely possible that a few of these whacked-out fruitbats might actually be useful to your character, but these individuals should be bought with the *Followers* background.

As these groups get larger (ratings of 3+), the fans/cultists will increasingly see the strictures of their organization as being far more relevant to their lives than the laws of civilized society, and will begin to disregard those laws in favor of the commands of the cult. That's when the really irrational activities begin taking place: masochistic ordeals, self-mutilation, and strange rituals held at some hidden locale in the middle of the night. Animal (and possibly human) sacrifices may take place as well. They'll also eventually begin assaulting people they see as “obvious heretics, infidels, and unbelievers” – typically anyone who annoys them or tries to convince the fans/cultists that they are deluded. If things get this bad, then all a character can really do to end this madness is to either leave the country (if not the planet) or have all of the cultists quietly disposed of one way or another.

Another problem posed by these people is that they are often hard to distinguish from the true “nova cults” that some novas have deliberately built up around themselves. While nova worship isn't nearly as widespread in the First World nations as it is in India, it's still found on occasion. This can draw a lot of unwelcome attention and suspicion to the idolized nova, especially

since the more paranoid observers will tend to discount her protestations of innocence as “an obvious sham”.

On rare occasions, if the group is still tiny (just 1 dot of this adversarial background) your character just might be able to convince them to permanently disband and leave her alone. Doing so will require heroic effort on the part of your character, along with some better-than-average role-playing. Even then, it's best that your character remove herself from both their vicinity and their lives as soon as possible. While some cults might quietly disband and try to return to normal life, others might see your character's efforts as a divine command to commit mass suicide, much in the manner of the Heaven's Gate UFO cult.

Fan/Cultist Numbers

- Tiny group, 5-50 people.
- Small group, 51-300 people.
- Moderate group, 301-500 people.
- Large group, 500-750 people.
- Huge group, 751-1,000 people.

Fan/Cultist Devotion

- They have put up and maintain a small shrine for you, despite your tearing it down nightly.
- They perform unwanted acts of devotion, but nothing that's illegal... so far.
- They commit minor crimes to prove their devotion, but will blame it on “misguided members”.
- They'll commit serious crimes to prove their devotion – and they'll try to justify them as such.
- Their worship of you supersedes all law – they'll do anything to show their devotion to you.

Background Enhancement: Horde

“Death to all of the unbelievers! Our Goddess has commanded it!”

The cult that worships your character may have been tiny once, but it now numbers in the thousands. They've even developed a semi-official hierarchy within the cult, complete with trappings comparable to that of any other religion. Making things worse is the fact that these people are also absolute savages. No act is too barbaric for these cultists to commit if their beliefs (or at least the cult's leaders) deem it necessary. Mass murder? *“They were heathens and unbelievers.”* Cannibalism? *“Our Goddess has decreed it, so that Her faithful may be strengthened!”* Abducting and brainwashing children? *“We rescued those children so that they could be redeemed by our Goddess, just as we were!”* And so on, *ad infinitum* and *ad nauseam*. These barbarians will do just about anything in the name of your character so that they can prove their devotion to her (and spread the cult's beliefs in the meanwhile). You can forget about your character keeping a good reputation with these maniacs running around and blackening her good name. There's no real point in trying to reason with them, either – they're operating on a wholly irrational mindset. They might even turn on your character if she tells them what they don't want to hear; the typical cultists' reaction in this case would be to brand your character as an impostor attempting to deceive them about who their nova idol really is and what she really wants. Things tend to get ugly from that point onwards.

Adversarial Background: Rival

This adversarial background indicates that your character has a rivalry with someone who's supposedly on her side, but who dislikes her more than a little for some reason. Perhaps the rival is merely jealous of your character's success in a certain field of expertise. On the other hand, the rival might want something that your character has — her reputation for being the best at what she does, a position of authority, or a lover. (Love triangles, anyone?) This adversarial background can even result from trivial things such as hate at first sight, a social blunder, or even a squabble between the characters that took place when both were little kids. What's worse is that the rival will often have some sort of advantage over your character; usually taking the form of greater personal wealth, coming from a higher social class, or simply being more attractive than your character. Alternatively, it could be that it's your character who is a rival of some other character — perhaps even one of the other player characters in your **Aberrant** chronicle. (Be sure to get permission from both the Storyteller and the other players in your group before creating an intra-group rivalry, as it can easily ruin a game if not handled correctly. It's also considered extremely bad form to declare another player character as your character's rival without that player's consent.)

What really makes this relationship irritating to all involved is that your character and her rival both belong to the same organization or faction. No matter how much they get on each other's nerves or trade nasty insults, they cannot simply haul off and attack each other in the manner of characters with the *Nemesis* background. Instead, they'll do their best to “act professional” while trying to act against each other in discreet ways. (As tempers flare, keeping things discreet will become less of an issue.) This sorry state of affairs becomes even more annoying when your character and her rival wind up having to work together in order to further the interests of the organization or faction that they belong to. The irritation factor typically reaches its greatest level when a character and her rival are forced to work together to protect a mutual love interest from some threat.

Unlike the *Nemesis* background, the dots of this adversarial background indicate both how often and to what degree your rival tends to interfere with you in some way (and vice versa).

- Trivial — The conflict between you and your rival keeps the others in your group entertained.
- Irritating — You and your rival will gladly backstab each other when it's convenient.
- Heated — The conflict between you and your rival is a major part of your life.
- Bitter — You and your rival will go out of your way to be at each other's throats.
- Consuming — If you and your rival weren't on the same side, she'd be your *Nemesis*.

Adversarial Background: Media Exposure

In the **Aberrant** setting, the influence and presence of the media can be felt in all but the most undeveloped regions of the world. While many novas can expect to find themselves the subjects of media scrutiny every so often, some of them have

become household names for one reason or another. These novas have had almost every detail of their lives — no matter how trivial — dug up and offered by the media for the amusement of the global audience. Given that a major focus of **Aberrant** is on such things as secrets, covert operations and double-agents, it's easy to see how the degree of media exposure represented by this adversarial background can be a major liability.

For each dot of *Media Exposure* possessed by your character, the Storyteller subtracts an additional level of difficulty (down to zero difficulties) to any investigations into him. This adversarial background can be lessened if your character takes certain radical steps to disassociate himself from his prior, well-known life (and spends a sufficient amount of experience points). Effective methods would include creating one or more alternate identities, faking one's own death, making permanent alterations to one's appearance, and changing all of your character's habits, preferred activities, and interests.

- A couple of things you'd have rather kept secret have made it into the headlines.
- Your data trails are as easy to follow as airstrip lights.
- Big Brother doesn't have to watch you — Big Media's doing it 24/7.
- If you ever develop amnesia, you'll have no trouble at all finding out who you are.
- You have very little in the way of personal privacy.

Background Enhancement:

Front Page Favorite

“What's it like, being recognized everywhere you go?”

“Tiresome, actually. Very, very tiresome.”

Your character has no secrets (or privacy) whatsoever. Even the residents of the most undeveloped backwaters on the planet are likely to have heard plenty about him. Any attempt to investigate something about your character that he'd rather keep hidden succeeds without any need for dice-rolling. The only exception to this would be if your Storyteller judges that your character has taken truly radical and extreme measures to keep a particular secret from getting out to the media. What's worse, this extreme degree of media exposure will now rub off on your character's family, friends, allies, and so on — your character's association with them will make them logical targets for media investigation. In this situation, your Storyteller will allocate your five dots of *Media Exposure* among your character's associates as she deems appropriate; your character's fiancée will certainly be of more interest to the media than his old drinking pals down at the local pub. These dots cannot be redistributed once allocated and will remain in place until the associate either severs all ties with your character or undergoes radical identity alteration; the dots will then return to your character.

Adversarial Background: Suitors

For some people, matters of the heart are much more complicated than normal. Whether it's due to being too attractive for one's own good, arranged betrothals, or simple twists of fate, a character with one or more Suitors will experience situations worthy of any daytime soap opera. While Shakespeare's quip that “the course of true love never did run smooth” may be a

hackneyed cliché nowadays, it's still true enough to make for some very interesting role-playing situations.

Romantic clichés aside, a character with this Adversarial Background seems to possess a near-irresistible attraction for obsessive members of the opposite (and possibly certain members of his or her own) gender. An infatuated individual will fall hopelessly in love (or lust) with the character, refusing to let go of her and unwilling to give her a moment's peace. If one or more rivals for the character's affections show up (usually other suitors), any suitor worth the designation will fight them in order to prevent them from consummating their relationship with the character. What's more, each and every suitor will have an ultimate goal for the character in mind – one that usually involves either standing before a wedding altar or renting a private hotel suite for the weekend...

This does not directly reflect any unusual charisma on the character's part, although she must have either Appearance or Charisma at 3 or more dots to qualify for this Adversarial Background. Rather, this indicates the character's fate to constantly meet obsessive people. She must also have a sufficiently plausible history to justify having encountered all those lovesick loonies. For instance, a character who's spent all of his life in an isolated monastery will not have had nearly enough of a social life to qualify. Finally, the character should neither be written nor played as a heartless, unsympathetic creep who would take advantage of a suitor's affections when it's convenient to do so. Such a loathsome person would never attract suitors in the first place.

What differentiates this from the True Love Merit is that for one reason or another, the character is guaranteed to find something objectionable each and every one of his or her suitors. The specific reason should vary with each individual suitor, but it will be enough to make the idea of marriage (or whatever other designs the suitor has on the character) somewhat less than appealing. Of course, most suitors won't take "no" for an answer, but will instead redouble their efforts to gain the character's affections.

It is possible for a character to have both the Suitors Background and the True Love Merit! In such a case, the character's true love will typically be one of his (or her) Regular suitors. While this suitor would be expected to have a much better shot at winning the character's heart, personality conflicts between the two of them will stand in the way of consummating their relationship if the other suitors don't!

The possibilities offered by this Adversarial Background are endless. A nova businesswoman could discover that one of her male rivals has fallen for her. A well-meaning grandmother could attempt to set her grandson up with a girl that she considers to be a perfect future bride for him – without considering his opinion on the matter. Characters from Eastern cultures could find themselves saddled with a betrothal arranged by their families. (The Japanese custom of *omiai* is an infamous example of this situation.) A female character could find herself being stalked. The lonely girl next door could decide that watching the guy of her dreams through his bedroom window simply isn't enough for her anymore. An attractive young coed could inflame the passions of her college professor. The young woman whom the character saves from a suicide attempt could easily come to see him as her

knight in shining armor. Cupid's arrow could simply strike a suitor like a bolt out of the blue. And so on, *ad infinitum*...

Suitors come in three varieties, each presenting their own brand of headaches for the hapless character. It's quite possible to be afflicted with more than one variety; the details are presented below.

- **Regulars:** Regulars are what people usually imagine when thinking of a suitor: a person whose constant presence in the character's life proves to be almost as much of a help as it is a hindrance. Roughly equivalent to the character in terms of capabilities, Regulars are the type of suitor who are the most serious about their relationship with the character. As such, the character can *occasionally* treat a Regular suitor as an Ally – with the provision that the Regular will always expect romantic favors in return for his or her aid. The typical form such a favor takes is the classic date, although there's no telling what lengths a Regular might go to in order to win the character's affections. **Note:** Regulars are by definition the kind of suitor that are hands-down the most tenacious in their pursuit of the character's affections, and have to be well-developed characters in their own right in order to do them justice. If the players and Storyteller are all comfortable with the idea, a chronicle could revolve around Regular suitors and their conflict over a mutual beloved, with the player characters playing the parts of the suitors and the hapless object of their affections. Hey, if it worked for the scriptwriters who produced *Tenchi Muyo!* and *Escaflowne*, (two anime series that do an excellent job of portraying male and female characters with this background, respectively), then there's no reason it couldn't work for you...

- **Occasionals:** Occasionals are just that: suitors who show up every once in a while in the character's life. In soap opera terms, one could think of them as guest stars or extras. They can range from roughly equivalent to somewhat less than the character in terms of capability. While more numerous than Regulars, they are also somewhat less obsessive about the character. While no suitor is easily brushed off, Occasionals will accept that their love is unrequited with significantly less fuss (and without spending experience points!). Occasionals make up for this lack of individual nuisance value with their sheer numbers – if a character manages to dissuade one Occasional, another one will inevitably crop up to take his place.

- **Heavyweights:** Love (or lust) can make fools of us all, and Heavyweights are no exception. Heavyweights are the rarest variety of suitor, and for very good reason. They are by definition superior to the character in terms of capability, making a well-crafted explanation about why the Heavyweight is in love with the character an absolute necessity. As a result, the Storyteller has the final say on whether this variety of suitor can be taken. Rough guideline: there had better be something pretty darn special about the character to justify having a heavyweight suitor! Suitors at this level aren't going to fall in love with just *any* pretty young thing. Heavyweight suitors take the problems associated with this Adversarial Background to a whole new level. For instance, what consequences will the character face as a result of becoming the focus of the Heavyweight's affections? How will the Heavyweight react if the character rejects her affections? Does the Heavyweight have enemies who wouldn't hesitate to strike at her by harming the character? Such is Love in the big leagues... (**Note:**

For a baseline, a nova suitor would have to be classified as a Heavyweight.)

Due to their relative power, Heavyweights are more difficult to deal with than either Regulars or Occasionals, and so are worth more in terms of Background dots. A Heavyweight will show up less frequently than other suitors since they often have obligations and concerns beyond their love life, but inevitably makes more of an impact in the character's life when she does show up. Whether this impact takes the form of deep ripples or a messy splash depends on the situation. In about one in a trillion cases, a character could have two Heavyweight suitors after him! (This situation would require 10 dots of this Adversarial Background.) In the unlikely case that a reasonably sane Storyteller lets this happen, the hapless character could easily wind up as the prize in the resulting tug-of-war between his Heavyweight admirers. For the classic version of this in Greek Mythology, check out the conflict between Aphrodite and Persephone over the affections of Adonis.

The only means of getting rid of unwanted suitors is through “buying off” this background with experience points and good role-playing – usually represented by choosing a suitor and forswearing all others. Suitors that are also True Loves, Allies, Followers, or Contacts are not exempt from this – the personality conflict must be resolved! Please note that this is NOT a cheap equivalent of either the True Love Merit or the Allies, Contacts, or Followers Backgrounds! Suitors are just that – people whose main goal is to get intimate with the character, all too often without any considerations for the character's feelings on the matter. If the player wants her character's suitor to be able to provide anything more substantial than a night of intimate entertainment (complete with the damnable consequences), she should buy the Suitor as a True Love, Ally, Follower, or Contact to reflect that particular suitor's higher caliber.

x	For good or ill, nobody is really interested in you.
•	1 Regular or 5 Occasionals.
••	2 Regulars or 10 Occasionals.
•••	3 Regulars or 15 Occasionals.
••••	4 Regulars or 20 Occasionals.
•••••	5 Regulars, 25 Occasionals, or 1 Heavyweight.

It is possible for some characters to have more than five dots of this Adversarial Background without having to take a Background Enhancement. As most of these cases won't involve being courted by two Heavyweight suitors, it's best for the character to have a mix of suitor types. The most common and workable blend is for the character to have a few Regular suitors and many Occasional suitors. Mixing Heavyweights into such a mess demands careful handling by the Storyteller, but that's usually par for the course where they're concerned. Unless the Storyteller is prepared to deal with a character who constantly has a veritable harem of admirers flocking around her, it's best to limit the maximum number of Regulars to four or five.

Background Enhancement:

Ladybait (for male characters), or Siren (for female characters)

“Pardon me, Mademoiselle Evans, but Mr. and Mrs. Weatherly would like to have a word with you.”

“What's the problem, Claude? The party's only just now started.”

“Oui, but there's a horde of young men at the door, and they're all saying that you invited them.”

If a character has 5 or more dots of the Suitors Adversarial Background, the Storyteller may see fit to “award” such a romantically devastating individual with this Background Enhancement. This reflects the fact that either the character's suitors are much more passionate about pursuing her (and competing with each other over her), or that there are many more suitors after the character than her Suitors rating indicates.

If this enhancement reflects a qualitative increase, the character's suitors are even more obsessive about the character than is normal with this Adversarial Background. They will not betray their friends, their ethics, or their sense of self-preservation for the sake of winning the character's love (or getting into the character's pants). The same cannot be said about sacrificing their careers, wealth, and/or dignity! As a basic guideline, such suitors will toss their common sense right out the window where the character is concerned. (That is, if they had any in the first place...) This version of the enhancement is best suited for chronicles with either a humorous or a highly romantic tone – although being the target of so many highly obsessive people can be *very* frightening, even for a nova...

If this reflects a quantitative increase, then the character may have literally hordes of suitors – and the character generally won't have a clue as to who they are! Movie stars and popular rock musicians are good real-life examples of this situation, as they can have literally thousands of admirers who would jump at the chance to get “up close and personal” with their beloved idol. In game terms, this is a radical increase in the number of Occasional suitors that the character may have. The exact number is up to the Storyteller, and should be tailored to the character's circumstances. A lady adventurer from the Roaring Twenties could plausibly have a hundred charming (and not-so-charming) men after her, while the hunky male lead vocalist in a 1980s-era rock group could have thousands of adoring female fans who would do almost *anything* for a backstage pass... and a chance for a private session with him!

Adversarial Background: Flunky

In every formally-structured organization there are those unfortunates who not only lack any authority, but who also have to perform more of the trivial, menial, dull and unpleasant duties (usually pawned off on them by their superiors) than even the newest grunts have to deal with. Characters who wind up with this adversarial background are just that sort of unlucky schmucks. In addition to being burdened with all of that extra scutwork, your character will be considered by his superiors to have little or no potential to advance in the organization. Aside from lacking any realistic hopes of being given serious authority or responsibilities, your character will also have to get used to being seen as a figure of fun and ridicule by everyone else in the organization who isn't in this sorry situation – even the grunts will laugh at him behind his back!

It's also entirely possible for a character who started out with the *Backing* background to earn this adversarial background due to poor decision-making or screwing up an important operation. Sometimes, even a simple misfortune that the

character had no possible control over, but for which the organization's leaders still needed to pin the blame for it on someone, is enough. In game terms, the character will lose all of his dots in *Backing*, which the Storyteller will replace with as many dots of this adversarial background as she sees fit. The total dots from these two backgrounds will then be replaced by an equivalent number of dots of the *Reputation* background (reflecting the character's fame as an incompetent buffoon). This will usually only happen to characters who had three or fewer dots of *Backing*; those who screw up while holding higher positions of authority generally suffer nastier and more permanent consequences.

Characters with the *Flunky* adversarial background would seem (at first glance) to be ripe for being recruited as double-agents by hostile organizations. There are two problems with this tactic. First off, most organizations with experience in counter-espionage will recognize this danger, and will keep a *Flunky* well away from anything important. Second, most *Flunkies* will have become so due to their foolishness and/or incompetence, and would make very poor double-agents.

It is possible for a character to rid himself of this adversarial background – it's just extremely difficult to do so, especially if he earned it for his incompetence. In addition to the necessary spending of experience points, the character must somehow manage to pull off some impressive feat that directly benefits his organization in some way. Alternatively, the character might commit some great deed that benefits some rival organization at the expense of his own. This can easily result in the character being hailed as a hero by the rival organization and being welcomed into their ranks, at the cost of becoming a hated enemy of his former organization.

- Minor punishment duties, or twice the total scutwork than a grunt has to perform.
- At least janitorial duty has some importance...
- Even the guys on janitorial duty look down their noses at you.
- If a job's worth doing, it's done well. If it's not worth doing, they give it to you.
- Whipping boy – your miserable lot helps keep up the morale of the grunts.

Background Enhancement: Scapegoat

If your organization has a job that's crappy, degrading, and possibly outright suicidal, your character is the luckless devil that they'll pin it on. Your character's organization will use him much like British coal miners once used canaries: they will blithely send him off into the worst situations they come across. If he survives, then they'll know that it's safe for the worthwhile members of the organization to be sent in. Once a character has received this adversarial background enhancement, the (remote) possibility of getting back into the organization's good graces possessed by other *Flunkies* is gone for good. The only feasible means of escaping this situation are as follows. (1) Dying in the course of performing one's duties. (2) Committing suicide. (3) Faking one's death and then creating an entirely new identity for oneself and having nothing to do with the organization from then onwards. (4) Utterly destroying one's organization – and possibly being hailed as a hero by the public for doing so. (5) Leave the Solar System, never to return.

Adversarial Background: Coercion

Just as in our own world, the world of **Aberrant** has plenty of unethical people who will stop at nothing to exploit a vulnerable person. And when that vulnerable person is a nova, then the stakes become even higher. This adversarial background indicates that some unethical person or group has managed to gain some sort of hold over your character, which lets them force him into performing services for them on a regular basis. While the possible motives, methods, and expectations of these people are too many to list here, they all boil down to what is essentially an exploitative relationship that's based on inducing fear and anxiety in your character. This sorry state of affairs is even more galling to novas, most of whom do not take well to being bossed around by other people. Unsurprisingly, these relationships all too often end with someone's messy and painful death.

There are three main questions which must be answered in order to show exactly what sort of burden a given character with this adversarial background will have to deal with. 1-Who is it that's coercing your character? 2-What method of coercion is being used? 3-What do they hope to gain by coercing your character? The answer to the first question is easy: it could be any person or group, provided that they've got enough nerve to try using this sort of social pressure on a nova. Possible methods of coercion will vary with the person or group who's doing it. A coercer in an Asian culture may call in a long-standing favor that the character's family might owe him, with the character being elected to repay the debt on the family's behalf. Individuals and groups have both been known to use blackmail. Threatening to harm a character's friends and/or family is also viable; many intelligence agencies are able and willing to “disappear” (read: kidnap & hold hostage) entire families. More direct methods usually involve kidnapping and enslaving the character, sometimes along with applying some sort of means to make the character suffer if he disobeys orders. Addiction to a drug that only the coercer can supply has long been a favorite of criminals, while some intelligence agencies might use a poison that will kill the character if he doesn't receive regular doses of the antidote from them. Explosive collars and implants have also been employed in this manner in the world of **Aberrant**. There's always old-fashioned brainwashing, of course. And then there are the various quantum powers and Social Mega-Attributes available to novas with which to enforce compliance.

All of this leads up to the third question: what does the coercer hope to gain from the character? The most typical reasons will be to exploit the character's quantum powers, especially if he has a power that's rare for some reason. Other possible motivations include forced conversion to the coercer's cause (often by means of the Stockholm Syndrome and/or brainwashing), keeping the character from joining the coercer's enemies or competition, or even the simple ego-boost of having made a nova into an involuntary servant. On a more personal (and darker) note, a coercer might want sexual favors from the character, or might seek to literally enslave the character for his or her own sick reasons.

(Storyteller Note: Be extremely careful about using this adversarial background in your chronicle. Many players cannot

stand to have their free will interfered with in any way, even if it would help further the plot. Some players will also have personal issues with exploitative relationships in general. If you plan to apply this adversarial background to a player character, you must talk it over with the player beforehand. This should never be forced on a player who isn't willing to shoulder this particular role-playing burden. Also remember that player characters will often have ways of escaping from this situation and dealing with the would-be coercers in a lethal fashion, and should be rewarded for doing so in an imaginative manner.)

The rating of this adversarial background depends on the duration of the period of service, with modifiers given for the various circumstances that might apply to the character's involuntary servitude. Please note that the higher ratings will also indicate a greater degree of resentment and outright hatred of the coercing party on the part of the character. At ratings of 3 or more, someone is almost guaranteed to wind up dead.

- Trivial – Anywhere from a few hours to one day's worth of service. Best to get it over with.
- Nuisance – Anywhere from two days to a month. Start planning some serious payback.
- Galling – Anywhere from one to six months. Get ready to kill whoever's holding your leash ASAP.
- Torment – Anywhere from six months to a year. You're effectively at war with your captors.
- Living Hell – There's no end in sight. Give no quarter, and accept none.

Modifiers:

- Your service is personally degrading and/or humiliating: +1 dot.
- Your service involves committing illegal acts, +1 to +3 dots, at the Storyteller's discretion.
- Your service puts you at risk of being seriously injured or killed: +1 to +3 dots, at the Storyteller's discretion.
- Your service involves performing sexual acts: +1 to +3 dots, at the Storyteller's discretion.
- Refusing to comply with the coercer will result in serious legal difficulties: +2 dots.
- Refusing to comply will result in your suffering serious harm: +2 to +3 dots.
- Refusing to comply will result in your loved ones suffering serious harm: +3 dots.
- Refusing to comply will result in your possible death: +3 dots.
- Refusing to comply will result in the death of one or more of your loved ones: +4 dots.

Adversarial Background: Skeleton in the Closet

Underneath its glitzy pop-culture façade, **Aberrant** is a game of mystery and conspiracy. As such, it's almost inevitable that a player character in your **Aberrant** chronicle might have one or more dangerous secrets that she'd prefer to keep safely buried. As the name implies, this adversarial background represents a dangerous secret of the character that could greatly

inconvenience her life if it were to be revealed. While this is often interpreted as a deed (either good or ill) that the character committed in the past that she tries to keep herself from being tied to, there are other possibilities. Being related to an infamous world figure or heinous criminal isn't something most people would want to announce to the world at large. Perhaps there's something special about the character's physiology that would make her a prime subject for intensive (and highly unpleasant) research of some kind. Then again, it might be that the character was mixed up in an embarrassing matter that would make everyone involved look ridiculous if the story was ever revealed.

When playing a character with this adversarial background, you should expect the Storyteller to have your character's secret threatened with exposure on an irregular basis. If the character successfully defends her dirty secrets from being exposed, she will retain this adversarial background. If the character is unsuccessful, the Storyteller will replace the dots of this adversarial background with an equivalent amount from another adversarial background that she deems appropriate. The only other way of getting rid of this adversarial background is to buy it off with experience points and better-than-average role-playing.

The dot ratings on the table below indicate both how damaging the character's secret would be to her life if it were ever revealed, and also how difficult it will be to bury the secret once and for all.

- Trivial – something that people will kid you about for years to come, but which can be “lived down” with a little effort. Alternatively, something that will attract unwelcome public attention to you every so often.
- Major – something that will prevent you from being seen as a “respectable” member of society. You can pretty much forget about ever getting a job promotion, pursuing a career as an elected politician, or marrying into a higher social stratum. Alternatively, something that will attract unwelcome public attention to you on a regular basis for decades to come.
- Serious – something that could brand you as an “undesirable” in the eyes of society. Losing your job and being rejected by your friends and loved ones are distinctly possible. Alternatively, something that will attract unwelcome public attention to you from fans, cultists, the media, and assorted opportunists.
- Grave – something that's bad enough to make you flee the area or wind up imprisoned by the authorities for a very long time. Alternatively, something that will attract intense and widespread public attention to you from the media.
- Life-wrecking – something that will make certain powerful people or organizations want to see you dead. Alternatively, something that could make you an involuntary

research subject in some secret lab until your escape or death, whichever comes first.

Background Enhancement: Boneyard in the Closet

A character with this background enhancement has a secret that's so big and/or damaging that she can forget having anything that even remotely resembles a normal life while living in Terran civilization if it's ever revealed to the public. If her secret is something bad, then it's something so utterly heinous that at least 90% of the populace of world at large will want her dead ASAP. If the secret would draw unwelcome public attention instead, then it's something big enough to have people hunting her down worldwide. If her secret is revealed, there will be no real way that the character can convince all of these people to simply leave her alone. The character's only real chance for keeping her freedom will be to leave the planet.

Adversarial Background: Wanted

In many **Aberrant** chronicles, it's not at all unlikely that a character won't at some time find herself the target of a manhunt for one reason or another. This adversarial background reflects the fact that the character has people who are actively pursuing her in order to detain her against her will. While the most common form of this is having the local, national, or international police out to arrest a character, there are many other options that can easily apply. If a character is known to be involved with a nova faction such as the Aberrants or Teragen, then having various secret agents who want to detain her for questioning is very plausible. Alternatively, there might be something special about the character that many scientists would dearly love to investigate. An aging billionaire might decide that there's something in the character's nova physiology that could act as a Fountain of Youth, and would have the resources to have the character brought in so that he could make a modest proposal. Being the target of some of the more aggressive recruiting methods employed by the various factions would also qualify a character for this adversarial background. Being abducted by a cult would also qualify. In all of these cases, the character must either evade whoever's trying to capture her or submit to having her freedom curtailed severely. As could only be expected, none of these people will take the character's refusal to surrender herself to them well at all.

The ratings on the table below indicate both how long the character can expect to be pursued and how much effort her pursuers will put into hunting her down.

• Halfhearted – They won't go out of their way to look for you, nor will they chase after you with any real effort. Just lie low and stay inconspicuous for a month or two, and it'll blow over.

•• Intent – They won't go out of their way to look for you, but they will do their best to catch you if you cross their path. They'll keep an eye out for you for up to a year before giving up – better leave the country.

••• Serious – They will go out of their way to look for you, and will do their best to catch you if you cross their path. They will also make looking for you a high priority, and will do so for up to five years.

•••• Dogged – They will take extreme measures in their attempts to find you, and will follow any lead they come across. They've made looking for you their latest top priority, and will do so for up to ten years.

••••• Hellbent – They will do just about anything that could possibly help them to hunt you down. Looking for you is their all-time top priority, and they'll keep looking until either you or all of them are dead and buried. You'd best leave the planet with lots of friends if you want anything resembling a normal life.

Public Opinion (Feel It, Don't Think It)

A day in the life of an Idol...

Ana Graça Texeira's planner, Friday, 2010
 5:00am - Wake-up and do make-up and hair. Yeah right.
 5:01am - review fan site and N! ratings of Novation! doll.
 5:05am - call manager, additional line of figures?
 6:01am - have breakfast
 7:05am - begin photo-shoot with Armaund.
 9:30am - meet with US East Coast fan club, and tell them "How much I just Love them!"
 11:00am - meet with lawyers: discuss copyright infringement of likeness.
 12:00am - AU fan club Opsite. Set up funds for agency to track
 1:00pm - business lunch, and meet with Kitty for message.
 2:30pm - Make presentation for the League of Women's Equality.
 3:05pm - sign autographs outside city-hall.
 4:00pm - Flight to Addis Ababa (catch a nap).
 7:00pm - (11:00pm local) Land at Addis Ababa Airport.
 7:20pm - (11:20pm local), Make grand entrance at Phoenix Room.
 11:00pm - (3:20am local), Catch return flight to NY.
 2:00am - Land at Dulles International Airport.
 3:00am - catch a couple hours sleep before tomorrow.

Same Battle, Different War

Mega-Social novas and Mega-Mental novas share the public arena, and can even compete in it, but their tactics are completely different. While a Mega-Mental nova may tabulate and balance the odds of any event or perceive abyssal depths in a statistical report, the Mega-Social nova doesn't worry about those silly things, much. A Mega-Social nova is all about the people – and the people will always go with their gut feeling about an issue, or at least that is what a Mega-Social is banking on.

While a Mega-Intelligent nova may explain and justify why another nova is wrong, and just plain evil, the common people could never hurt a hair on that nova, if they can't overcome their feelings.

How Mega-Socials Wage WAR!

Every war has casualties, and wars of the emotions are no exception. After the noise and confusion of the conflict settle, the used and battered emotions of the followers still remain. And a friend scorned is a dangerous thing. Think about how many things even your casual acquaintances know about you. They

might know a place or two you like to eat, places you like to hangout, and a few of your hobbies. Now imagine what they could do with that information to hurt you. Mega-Social Attributes by their very nature heighten the emotional playground of life, and the price of this high is the occasional emotional backlash. And like most emotional hurts, this backlash is not always immediate or obvious. A person you use today may not even realize how they were used until months later. When they do realize it, they may not act upon their anger for years, either out of fear, a sense of honor, or lack of opportunity. Once an opportunity presents itself, though, many a victim will gladly help to cause the nova an equal amount of pain and suffering.

This darker side of emotional manipulation is why many Mega-Social novas work so hard to seem like “nice people”, and set up their complex layers of social buffers between themselves and their fans. While it limits their powers, this buffering also protects them from the common backlash of scorned fans.

A Nova’s Pride

When novas clash, the effects often spill over to the sidelines and baselines are often the victims. Mega-Social conflicts are no less messy, though the scars and wounds are not always visible. When a Grifter, Idol, and Charmer come into conflict, the outcome is never certain, though certain abilities do make a difference.

Mega-Manipulative Grifters have the advantage of being able to persuade any weak willed player in a conflict, and their inherent ability to detect other’s manipulation always grants them a degree of security. Thus, when either an Idol or Charmer tries to play them, most Grifters are aware of the attempt, and can consciously decide if they will go with the flow or try to fight it. It is this ability to consciously choose, which grants the Grifters their greatest advantage over other Mega-Social novas.

Mega-Attractive Idols or Mega-Ugly Squids have the gift of forcing a quick first impression, and the fear of their displeasure to wield over other novas. While their appearance grants no direct protection from manipulation or the charming wiles of another nova, it does discourage others from thinking they can get away with it. If Idols and Squids have a common weakness, it’s to the Charmers of the world, being isolated by their looks from most people. Squids and Idols often hunger for an emotional connection. Charmers are of course well suited to offer that connection, even if it’s a false connection.

Mega-Charismatic Charmers are friends to everyone. Their charm and congeniality offers them many opportunities to openly interact with others. Their love of public social activities, offers them a certain degree of protection from Grifters, and makes them a natural compliment to a willing Idol or Squid. This ability to mesh well with an Idol or Squid also makes them more vulnerable to the weapons of appearance and looks. Charmers often lack the perceptions of the Grifters, and so often miss the subtle manipulations of false first impressions, awesome looks and frightening visages. Charmers are often victims of manipulation if they are not careful to stay in the light of the public eye.

When Mega-Social novas fight in the public eye, the media often picks sides before the battle is explained or won. It is the Mega-Ugly nova that often has the toughest battle in the court of opinion, but the issues surrounding that problem are touched upon in the Mega-Appearance essays in Chapter Four. The darlings of

the Media spotlight are the Mega-Attractive novas. It is their nova gifts that come across best when the cameras are rolling, a Grifter might be able to twist the arm of the studios and kill a story via blackmail, and a Charmer may well be beloved by those who interview and tape their appearances and avoid the hard questions, but it is the Idol that the masses want to see and hear from. Idols have the special gift of reaching the masses through their visual appeal. That being said, few baselines want their Idols to run for political office. It is when you leave the arena of popularity that you start to see the Grifters and the Charmers perform better than the Idols. The Grifters, of course, are at an advantage when orchestrating their next step, and it is the Charmer that can smooth any problem over. In truth it is working together that the three Social Mega-Attributes work best. Should a nova gifted with all three traits attempt to enter the political arena, they would be a force to be dealt with and they would face the fiercest battle of their lives as the established media machines of the baselines work to destroy them.

What If My Character Is Better Than Me?

A common problem players face is that their character may be more manipulative than the player could ever be, and sometimes a roll of the die just won’t suffice in bringing the actions of the story across. There are a few things Players and Storyteller can do to bring across their character’s superior abilities.

- **Mega-Appearance:** Characters with high ranks of Mega-Appearance literally make every one stop and stare, even if just briefly to check them out. Storytellers should remember that Mega-Appearance novas always looks fresh and vibrant, and never run-down (unless they are low on quantum), this makes them great targets for local media. Storytellers can make this point constantly. This effect could dog the player’s character continuously, unless the character starts using disguises. In general this also means that the character can expect some local reporter to show up wherever they are after an hour or so, especially if it’s a slow news day.

- **Mega-Manipulation:** Characters with high ranks of Mega-Manipulation quickly become rather jaded; they can see that everyone uses one another, even subconsciously. So regardless of why others want to be with the nova, it’s painfully obvious to the nova. The Storyteller can truly torment the Grifter with this painful truth. For example, a distant friend comes to visit the newly erupted nova, and the Grifter suddenly realizes that the “friend” has only been keeping in touch because they are hoping to be seen on the news.

- **Mega-Charisma:** Characters with high ranks of Mega-Charisma are often overwhelmed with eager-to-please baselines; everyone tries to be nice, and laughs at their jokes. A Mega-Charismatic nova can sometimes be thrown off by that one NPC that does not buy into their Charismatic appeal, whether it’s a nova or a baseline with high Willpower, or unique background. It can also be a life lesson when an officer ticketing the nova for speeding appears obviously distressed about ticketing the nova, but he still tickets the nova to avoid angering his superior officer watching from the cruiser.

A Player can become frustrated at the lack of “useful” information the Storyteller gives them about people’s motivations. A helpful mechanic for easing the strain on the Storyteller’s time and the player’s frustration is to prepare the player with a listing of some standard motivations of NPCs (such as Money, Fame, Power, Help, Attention) and allow the player to work out ways that their nova could offer such things. This exercise will help both Storyteller and Player to get into the habit of thinking of how people manipulate each other daily. If both Storyteller and Players agree they can even expand the listing to have a positive and negative values (Money/Support, Fame/Friendship, Power/Favor, Help/Service, Attention/Love), for example if an NPC is driven by a need for Money, they will often want the cash no questions asked, and no real promise of pay-back. An NPC driven by a need for Support would honestly believe that they are asking for a loan, with every intention of repaying the nova. Storytellers that wish to make the reading of manipulation more difficult, may decide to not tell the Player which aspect of the need is truly in play, unless they make a high enough of a success.

Social Warfare

Aberrant: Worldwide Phase 1 suggests a technique of using symbolic combat to represent social maneuvering in the public eye. The system works fine if you are trying to compete with another for some prize or victory condition, but does little to aid in the abstract conflicts of two shadowy novas. So the system has been expanded to address this short-coming.

This optional system is intended to flesh out the abstract nature of social conflict with Mega-Social powers. While it is not intended to replace genuine role-playing, this system does endeavor to allow both Players and Storytellers to explore social struggles beyond baseline perceptions. Whether your players have little or no interest to explore social sparring in detail, or if your players feel uncomfortable in playing out the social dog-fighting of the masters, this system will give the tools necessary to make it happen.

- **Who should use this?** Players with Mega-Social traits of two or higher will receive the most benefit from this system. Storytellers presenting stories with national or epic scales of effect will find this system ideal for representing nova and baseline conflicts.

- **Who should ignore this?** Players with no Mega-Social traits, or Storytellers that are trying to tell stories of personal conflict, and human emotions. While the system presented below can be used to resolve such problems, it reduces them to a handful of dice rolls.

The System

This system creates a combat metaphor for the social, emotional and intellectual conflicts of novas and elite baselines. The system converts a crude remark about someone’s lineage, into a quick jab, that can be soaked as social bashing damage.

The initial setup rules are from the White Wolf book, **Aberrant: World Wide Phase 1**, after these rules are introduced this section continues reviewing the applications of the various (metaphorical) Mega-Physical enhancements.

Social Combat Set-up

- For each Mega-Charisma enhancement the player may choose 1 Mega-Stamina enhancement.
- For each Mega-Manipulation enhancement the player may choose 1 Mega-Dexterity enhancement.
- For each Mega-Appearance or Mega-Wits (choose one) enhancement the player may choose 1 Mega-Strength enhancement.

In games with few Mega-Social novas allow the fourth and fifth dot in any Mega-Social attribute to count as enhancements for this purpose.

Social Maneuvers are limited to Close Combat maneuvers and a selection of Special Nova Maneuvers. The Storyteller is the final arbiter of any permitted maneuvers, and the set of valid maneuvers may vary with each conflict. The nature of social combat prevents “ranged combat”, as such distant attacks have no meaningful impact in the public eye. **[Note:** restrictions and requirements described in the various combat maneuvers still hold, so unless the nova has the social equivalent of Hyperspeed or Flight, maneuvers dependant on such powers are not accessible.]

Idea: Some Storytellers may want to assign permanent Physical enhancement analogies for each player. Or more ambitious Storytellers may assign a different set of enhancement analogies for differing Social Arenas. I.e. A nova artist would have one set of Meta-Social enhancements when dueling in the arena of the Art world, and another, when discussing global policy.

Maneuvers in Personal Interactions

Social combat on a personal level is short term. Even if the nova “kills” their opponent socially, in such a small venue, the effects rarely last more than a week. Only if it is broadcast across the globe, or the combat ended with the loser “slain” with aggravated damage would the loser perhaps take any drastic actions (at Storyteller’s discretion, the loser may become depressed, moody, or listless for a number of days, they may also make a Willpower Test, no successes indicating they are inclined to perform a violent action against either themselves or their attacker).

For example, throwing someone to the ground is equivalent to a personal attack, confusing statement or any other action that leaves an enemy temporarily at a loss for words.

A clinch resembles a competition for a single claim – e.g. “I’m the Christian candidate” – that locks both candidates together, unable to strike directly at the others’ position. While a nova with the Flexibility enhancement, might be able to strike from a new angle.

Maneuvers through the Media

The media has the power to affect the whole world. A social conflict between individuals can impact all that watch, and can force political shifts in local government.

Turns are measured in months when waging combat via the media and public perception. Even when two opponents speak out in a matter of days, the public reaction is not always immediately visible.

Arts, Perform, Rapport, Style and Subterfuge are used in such Advertising campaigns. These skills are used instead of Martial Arts or Brawl, though the martial analogy is maintained where an astute Perform + Manipulation test can be equated to a Smack down.

Social Combat

Verbal combat takes place during a series of claims comments and verbal attacks, these spoken feints and attacks on the other person range in their damage type depending how fatal the statements are to the opponent. If any claims are true and proven in the public eye (if it is a lie, but the masses believe it to be true, it is still a deadly attack), then the attack can generate social damage. Statements that would only affect a minority of the public's opinion are considered Bashing damage, those that affect either a majority of the public in a striking manner (i.e. "My opponent plans to raise taxes when he is elected"), or pushes critical issues with a vocal minority (at least 40%) can be Lethal to the opponent's public life. Attacks that completely invalidate the opponents' stances and issues can become Aggravated attacks. Aggravated attacks by nature must be true and provable (i.e. the public won't treat it serious if the accusation cannot be proven in some manner), and the attack will not reach the core of the opponent's psyche if the statement is false. Purely intangible attacks that have no bearing on the target audience, (i.e. declaring that your opponent is a nova, can be an Aggravated attack if they are representing an anti-nova organization, but if this claim is proven false, it can backlash as a "Reflected" attack on the accuser.

Damage

Characters soak "damage" from their opponent's rolls with Charisma and Mega-Charisma and can spend a turn inactive, healing one level of damage (Bashing, Lethal or Aggravated).

Examples: A character can use Enhanced Movement to keep one social opponent from "closing" while dealing with another opponent. An attractive nova may use their Mega-Appearance (a.k.a. Mega-Strength) and could "crush" someone who impugned her competence. A Mega-Manipulated smack down would originate as an outlandish claim that can neither be proved or disproved, but offends one segment of their audience.

The following section expands the write-up of the published physical enhancements, for the sake of Social Combat.

Social Combat Enhancements

These enhancements use the same mechanic as indicated in the **Aberrant** Core book and **Aberrant Players Guide**, save where contradicted above. In the personal arena, quantum must be paid for these enhancements, in the slower marketing and commercial arena, no quantum is expended, though Willpower points are still required where indicated.

Strength (Appearance/Wits)

- **Crush:** Converts a Bashing attack into a Lethal attack. The nova has the wit and looks to make a normal slight into a full-blown insult or derision.

- **Irresistible Force:** Adds +2 Difficulty to resisting Knockdown from a successful Strength attack. Social attacks from such a nova does not cause additional damage, but makes it harder to recover ones composure.

- **Lifter:** The nova may successfully bear especially weighty issues and subjects in the public eye, topics which may be untouchable by any other nova can be handled and borne for a short time, in a manner such that a single opponent is forced to back off. (They would have to spend a turn just rebuilding their opposition to reengage the nova.

- **Precision:** A nova with this enhancement can determine how many of their successes will count toward social damage, and how many will be ignored by the public (and thus the target). The nova knows exactly how far to go, to damage their opponent as much or as little as they desire.

- **Quantum Leap:** A nova may use their prodigious Strength to "Leap" from a dangerous situation and force a change to another topic. The nova attacked, can respond by linking, back to a previous topic, or a completely new topic that is immune to the attacker's current statements.

- **Shockwave:** This weapon can only be used when the nova is on solid (moral) ground, and has one or more opponents engaging them. This enhancement is used to Knock Down any prepared attacker against the nova, by dropping a Witty conundrum, or a cute pout, that publicly embarrasses or makes their opponent speechless, this can also be used in shocking opponents with inappropriate language or actions, that if used well, can gain the nova a turn to build their defenses. Victims with Quantum Leap can "jump" away from the strike.

- **Thrower:** a nova may use this to "throw" verbal attacks at their opponents, before they are actually facing each other. The inability for their victim to retaliate does not reduce this attack's power; nor does Quantum Leap or Hypermovement aid in avoiding this attack.

- **Thunderclap:** Like Shockwave, save that its effects are less powerful, and it cannot be "jumped" away from. This permits broad generalized accusations, "There is not an honest man in this room," that the nova can use to force their opponents to spend an action recovering or responding, while they save themselves from harm, "Thankfully I am a woman".

Dexterity (Manipulation)

- **Accuracy:** The nova gains 3 additional dice to attack a victim. This enhancement requires one turn spent gathering facts, evidence and public opinion. The nova is adept at knowing not necessarily how hard, but knows exactly where (instinctively) to push hardest. The nova can sense what issues or ideas the opponent seems to shy from. And can use this insight to ensure that most of their attacks hit him where he hurts.

- **Catfooted:** The nova with this enhancement is hard to pin down in any information gathering, and is often overlooked in smear campaigns. The nova gains 3 extra successes when attempting to remain unnoticed. This enhancement lasts for one turn in combat, or one scene in peaceful information gathering sessions. Whenever the nova is being targeted for an attack, or if the nova learns an opponent is preparing a Shockwave of a statement, they can use this enhancement to tip-toe around the issue and to temporarily drop off the media radar, if they make their roll.

- **Enhanced Movement:** A nova with this enhancement can make a Dodge roll to escape a closing opponent for one turn. Unfortunately such fleet movement makes it hard for the public eye to stay focused on the nova's stances and issues. In the Social

Arena continued use of this enhancement can reduce the credibility of the nova.

- **Fast Tasks:** Non-Combat actions, such as propaganda gathering, are performed quicker and with the same degree of precision as if they were working at a normal pace. (No increased difficulty for rushing the task). This enhancement is a natural aid to the Accuracy enhancement, when the victim has a high Cipher background slowing information gathering. Regardless of its effect Fast-Tasks will not reduce the time needed to less than one turn.

- **Fine Manipulation:** Permits the nova to express the differences between two very similar issues, in a manner that the general audience can comprehend easily. Novas with this enhancement have no increased difficulty when attempting to express the difference between two very minute or similar topics.

- **Flexibility:** Novas with this enhancement can get a grip on remote opponents without closing the distance. “My opponents may refuse to meet me on common ground, but I can tell you what they would say...” This enhancement makes this form of reaching seem natural. This enhancement also permits closed quartered conflict, when two opponents are in a clinch.

- **Omnidexterity:** A nova with this enhancement has no problem dueling two opponents at the same time. This enhancement only negates the two handed penalty in the conflict, so the nova still needs to split their dice pools for non-area effects.

- **Perfect Balance:** The nova has an amazing ability to avoid taking the “fall” in social arenas, always careful in how they speak, such novas can dodge accusations meant to make them seem guilty. When attacked with a Sweeping statement of a Trick Question (a two-punch combo), the nova may ignore such cheap ploys, as they have a natural ability to avoid such attacks. If the attack however is of extraordinary potency (revealing the nova's unknown love child, while attacking their stance on morality, or catching them in admitting to Murder) the attacker may force an extra Dexterity test to see if they keep on their feet. If the test succeeds, the nova still keeps their poise.

- **Physical Prodigy:** When performing, or making a “grand entrance” in the social arena, the nova gains 3 extra successes for their roll. It cannot be used to dodge attacks.

- **Rapid Strike:** When a nova is armed with two or more attacks against an opponent, they can use this enhancement to deliver their multiple attacks at once in tandem, thus gaining extra effect in their harangue. For every dot in Mega-Manipulation, the nova gains an extra die for determining the damage of the attacks.

Stamina (Charisma)

- **Adaptability:** This enhancement allows the nova to survive in the most hostile of social arenas. This will not save a nova dropped into a Lethal social setting, but it will let them enter one cautiously and seem quite at home. While this will not affect the audience, this enhancement will negate any penalty the home court effect might inflict on the visiting nova.

- **Durability:** The nova has the social charisma to shrug off Lethal social damage and convert it internally into Bashing damage.

- **Hardbody:** The nova has the ability to convert an Aggravated attack into Lethal damage. The use of this enhancement costs 1 Willpower.

- **Health:** The nova is adept at fighting off Poisonous and snide remarks, by reducing the number of dice by their Mega-Charisma rating. 1 Willpower point must be expended to negate one turn worth of Aggravated poisonous gossip.

- **Immovable Object:** The nova is adept at resisting being flatfooted by Thunderclap, Shockwave, or the after-effects of a slam. The nova is unmoved by most shocking events, threats and inappropriate behavior.

- **Regeneration:** the nova may heal one level of Damage for every point of Willpower the Nova expends.

- **Tireless:** the nova can endure any relentless attack, from numerous opponents. One turn per point of Mega-Charisma

- **Resilient:** the nova's soak is doubled. The nova's denouncements, denials, or reactions to any attack have greater effect resisting any social attack.

CHAPTER THREE: STORYTELLING

Introduction

If you're reading this then you're either a Storyteller or have bright ambitions to become one. Good Luck. Hopefully this chapter will help organize some of the challenges and opportunities awaiting you and your Mega-Social Novas.

Theme

As in any **Aberrant** game the theme of your campaign is central to the stories you tell. Themes of responsibility will force your players to gain an awareness of their powers and what role they chose to use them in. Themes of Normality emphasize the player's struggle to maintain a normal (or normal seeming) lifestyle while adjusting to their new found power. Themes of awareness can force players to finally understand the deeper forces at work in their lives. Themes of isolation can highlight a player's uniqueness and the loneliness that accrues from being at the top.

Responsibility

A theme most aptly used for Mega-Social novas. Mega-Social novas are the most sorely tempted of novas to use their powers with impunity. Most other novas have to deal with photographic evidence of their misdeeds, and evidence of after-effects of their actions. Mega-Social novas do not have these tells to deal with. A sensuous smile, a glib word or a friendly rejoinder are the weapons and tools of a Mega-Social nova. Storytellers should keep in mind that unlike the nova brick, a Mega-Social nova needs bounds placed on them outside of normal criminal law, or they need a sense of responsibility.

- **Personal Responsibility:** Being forced to face the consequences of your actions, to take the brunt of the blame for what you do, is one of the hardest things a person has to do in real life. It is often just as hard in a game. Many players play **Aberrant** to escape reality, so forcing them to deal with real consequences for their actions may bring them down, or it may make the struggles of the game that much more real. A Mega-Attractive nova may have to deal with their unbounded flirtations, and the heart ache it causes a new lover's ex-wife. A Mega-Manipulative nova could have to deal with the consequences of controlling a situation to a specific outcome, and later have to face the evicted victims of their manipulations. A Mega-Charismatic nova may make friends with someone to get to a resource, but will have to deal with their accusing eyes when the ruse is ended.

- **Professional Responsibility:** Similar to personal responsibility, though it can be used and presented differently,

since the actions of the organization or team the nova belongs to are impacting the nova. It is often easy for a player to shrug and say, that "I did not attack the mayor, it was another Terat," or that "I was just following my instructions." But in a story focused on Professional Responsibility, this can't be allowed without ramifications. One way to show this is by throwing the nova's nonchalance in his face, or forcing them to eat his words. The same nova that takes such an irresponsible stance could face those same words when he loses a contact or associate and a NPC that could have helped merely shrugs and shirks their responsibility to their organization.

Normality

For every nova that craves the spotlight, there is a nova that desires the dark shadows of normality. This theme will focus a story to highlight and contrast the player's lifestyle with baseline lifestyles. Whether it's a jet set life, with glamour and opulence, a shadowy existence seeing betrayal in every smiling face, or the home life where you can read your baseline spouse's every selfish desire before she voices them; Mega-Social novas are constantly singled out and denied a normal life. These stories will focus on the down time, the non-combatant scenes where the nova must interact in a social way, and must deal or cope with society's reactions, good or ill.

- **Being Normal:** No matter how things change, certain aspects of the nova's life will stay quite boringly normal. The Mega-Attractive nova still has domestic disputes, the Mega-Manipulative nova still has to pay their debts, and the Mega-Charismatic nova must still pay the rent (literally or indirectly). A story focused on this form of Normality will offer both humorous and stale encounters, where the players can explore the "normal" aspects of their lives.

- **Being Abnormal:** No matter how things change, certain aspects of the nova's life will never be the same. This theme will draw to the forefront how certain normal tasks are forever denied the nova. A Mega-Social nova with the Suitors adversarial background may have a story centered on their inability to have a quiet night in front of the TV watching their favorite film. Being abnormal can be taken for granted, unless the opportunity to be normal (even in private) is denied.

Awareness

This theme focuses on the perceptions of the players, and emphasizes the sometimes painfully obvious motivations of all non-Mega-Social novas around them. Mega-Social novas are constantly in tune with some aspect of the social scene.

A Mega-Attractive nova will always make a point of knowing who's looking good and who isn't. A Storyteller can enhance this aspect, by always pointing out to the Mega-

Attractive nova who is wearing the latest fashions, who is wearing just horrible clothing, and who is “trying” to look “almost” as attractive as them. The same can be said about a Mega-Ugly nova.

A Mega-Manipulative nova will always be on the look out for other sharks in the water. The motivations of baselines will be painfully apparent, and anyone actually capable of pulling a fast one on the Grifter, may be the one person they could relate to, but will never know it, at the time. The courtship of two Grifters can be the telling of an epic, as each tries to test the true intentions of the other.

A Mega-Charismatic nova will have their senses tuned into the social graces of everyone. In knowing how to please everyone, a Charmer will also see who is equally socially adept. Charmers will see boorish louts, and naive socialites, but rarely a true master of etiquette. Storytellers can bring the social aspects alive to those with the ability to see the Social tapestry.

Isolation

Mega-Social novas are constantly isolated, even in crowds. Everyone sets the Mega-Social nova apart from the rest, the Storyteller has a unique opportunity to use this theme intertwined with almost any other theme. Rarely can a Mega-Social nova find an equal among the throngs, and so many social novas end up in meaningless relationships, that merely fill the time with conversation or at least reduces the time when the nova is physically isolated.

- **Mega-Appearance:** For Mega-Attractive novas: Everywhere you look, you see lesser beauties, no one who looks as nice as you do. For Mega-Ugly novas: Everywhere you look, you see the angels and baselines, no one who looks as you do. Perhaps if you had a mirror you could bask in your own appearance. By pointing out how no one really appears to be in the same class as the nova, the Storyteller forces to the player's awareness onto their own vanity and isolation.

- **Mega-Manipulation:** Everyone is a drone, no one thinks for themselves. No one the player meets is truly honest, or guileless. And if such a person is ever met, the nova must wonder if the person is as they seem or a better Grifter than they.

- **Mega-Charisma:** Smiling happy people stare at you, each wanting to be your friend, but none of them able to give you what you need, an equal partner. Running this theme entails a bit more work than some, because the best way to introduce this theme is through kindness. You can literally kill the nova with kindness. After a while the nova may become hostile and angry that no one will disagree with them, no one will confront them for their rudeness. Or perhaps an NPC will laugh at the charming nova while pointing out that no one is honest with the nova.

Conflict

Many traditional conflicts have already been introduced in the core **Aberrant** book, here are few more geared toward Mega-Social novas.

- **Nova vs. Baseline:** Mega-Social novas are ideal for dealing with baseline conflicts. Stories that focus on how novas help and exasperate baseline issues would be ideal for Mega-Social nova teams.

- **Looks vs. Brains:** Mega-Social novas could get involved in a rather challenging story where they must pit their outward appearance against the intellectual attacks of an adversary. Perhaps they are targeted by an extremist political organization (or a rival social club, or intelligence agency), for the clothes they wear, the people they are seen with, or the businesses they support or frequent. The Mega-Attractive nova could become the target of a smear campaign directed by a very intelligent foe (baseline or nova). Forcing the Mega-Social nova to step out of their traditional territory, and perhaps actually performing careful research to discover the true source of the attacks may be enlightening, and rewarding. Once the mystery is solved, the Mega-Social nova can initiate a social combat to vindicate and repair their damaged image and reputation.

- **Social vs. Brawn:** Nothing is more challenging than setting a Mega-Social nova against a Mega-Physical nova. In a direct fight the Mega-Social will lose, but if the Mega-Social nova can select the setting or the weapons of the conflict, the Mega-Social nova can emerge victorious every time. Perhaps if the Mega-Social does their job right, the Mega-Physical nova will not even show up for the fight.

- **Social Competition:** Pitting one Mega-Social nova against another Mega-Social nova can be rather dull if both are of the same ability and skill. But the ability to enter a social combat makes the protracted conflict rather visceral. Utilizing social combat the first time may be a little intimidating the first time, but once the social nova publicly dresses down a rival at the local dance club, they will live for the social dueling that may arise.

- **Constructive vs. Destructive:** Social novas have the choice to battle an opponent with constructive instead of destructive activities. In **Aberrant** most novas win a conflict by destroying their enemy, but in the arena of the Mega-Social nova, victory can be had by building oneself up to the point that the other side is dwarfed, and therefore ignored, and loses the conflict by default.

- **Social Warfare: Televised Soldiering in the 21st century:** The battle of the Big Media is ongoing and ever consuming. Prior to the Nova Age no one individual ever successfully defeated Big Media. Fortunately, most novas are as powerful as some of the largest publicity firms in the world. So the kid-gloves are off, and the Mega-Social novas are ready to take on the giant gears of the media. Who will win and who will lose can be decided by whose talk show has that exclusive incriminating video footage, or the longest uninterrupted station feed. Mega-Social novas are ripe to champion a cause or video station, and may the best nova win.

Factions

Each faction has the need for Mega-Social Novas; these special novas are ideal front-men, deal makers and leaders.

- **Utopia:** Project Utopia needs Mega-Social novas more so today than they ever did. It is the Mega-Social novas that play critical roles in peace talks and border negotiations. It is the Mega-Social nova that will turn the tide of public opinion polls back towards its record high ratings. If you have low taint and high Social skills, Utopia has a job for you.

- **Aberrants:** The Aberrants are fighting a war of perceptions, and every nova counts. The Mega-Social novas will be critical in the final days before the Aberrant cause must inevitably leave the shadows and confront Utopian propaganda.

- **Project Proteus:** As a hidden organization, Proteus has little need for idols, but Grifters and Charmers are being recruited slowly. At first they were primarily a brute squad for the shadow wars, but as the years progress, their need for positional advantage among the warring factions increases.

- **The Directive:** If you do not look human, are an idol or cannot follow orders, the Directive won't even consider you. If you are a master of charm and manipulation, the Directive may consider you a threat. Either way, you might be able to avoid their aggression if you join their team. Right?

- **Elites and Others:** These factions need non-combatants badly. While not as glamorous as killing and blowing things up, Elite organizations need Mega-Social novas to grease the wheels of commerce. No one else will touch you? Not a problem among the elite.

Running a Mega-Social Game

Everyone Loves You When You Are A Star!

Mega-Social novas live glamorous lives often filled with beauty, attention and praise; it is this very special treatment that will draw players to the Mega-Social powers. It is important to allow your socially gifted players to reap the rewards of these powers, even if the story is an **Aberrant** tale of betrayal and being hunted. It is the small things, preferential treatment at a restaurant, an easy perception role to discern a person's motive, or the ease to which a nova makes friends with a corporate aid, which keep a Mega-Social nova engaged with the daily challenges. A few easy victories for the socially adept nova will make all the trials ahead worth while, especially if they are encounters that will introduce a future story hook or two.

I Am the Party

As a Mega-Social nova develops and grows they will – not may – develop into a dominating force within their chosen niche. It is important to track this carefully, for as their power grows their expectations will grow, and they will become harder to reign in at critical moments.

It is very important to craft the young nova's niche of power carefully from the beginning of the story. While a player may insist that they are the social god of all things, the Storyteller must help define the actual scope and impact of this "divinity". Otherwise, the social magnetism of the player never evolves beyond simple number manipulation. For example a Mega-Charismatic nova may be interested in dominating their nation's major political party, which is fine, but it should be realized that she will not be the only one. As her power grows over time, she may rise to a high standing within the party, but she will have also made enemies within and without her party (it's a natural effect among the power hungry). In this instance the nova will usually have the added challenge of not appearing

to use her powers for advancement, as some may construe their power usage as "cheating". It then becomes a simple matter of dealing with when the losers unite publicly or privately. Political agendas may cause new political platforms to arise. For example, a new issue may be born from the nova's abuses. Instead of campaign budget reforms we have nova power usage reform for political campaigns. Though positioning opponents around ideals instead of vendettas may be preferable, occasionally a personal vendetta is perfect for keeping a player on their toes.

Unlike Physical Mega-Attributes, Social Mega-Attributes can be successfully opposed by the masses with sufficient organization. Baselines are frightened by anyone who is seen as grabbing at too much power at once. Once the public becomes frightened, the media outlets are soon to follow – and who is to say that the media would not start a scare in the public for their own ends?

Mega-Social novas are unique among their brethren, in that they are heavily dependant on the presence of others for their powers to be effective. This need for minions, followers and allies will discourage solo power plays. This simplifies the Storyteller's ability to enforce the weakness of baseline NPCs, and their limited understanding of the nova's intentions. The most meticulous nova cannot always prevent a lone misguided baseline follower from falling in love or getting drunk with the wrong person, and accidentally spilling their secrets to the wrong ears.

One Step Ahead

During the course of most games players with Mega-Mental and Mega-Social abilities will be privy to additional information. Mega-Manipulative novas will often gain an extra two or three words about every NPC they meet describing their new mark. Mega-Appearance novas will need a few extra words describing the attractiveness of all present. Mega-Charismatic will want to know how much they are liked by all present. These subtle differences in description will enhance the information the Players have and how they interact with the story.

Of all of the Mega-Social novas only the Mega-Manipulative novas will regularly receive information that is not immediately obvious to all present. A Grifter can sense when they are being or are witnessing manipulation. These indicators are critical to a budding Grifter. A Storyteller may want to have a few prewritten index cards with a few simple descriptors for the Grifter. It would be understood that these cards describe the most subtle of motivations, and not all of these would be conscious tells. The cards could have the following: "They are hiding something", "Liar liar pants on Fire (they are lying)", "You Sense no Deception", "They Seem Anxious", etc.

For Mega-Charismatic and Mega-Appearance novas the Storyteller needs to incorporate adjectives and extra descriptors for the players to act upon. Emphasizing a baseline dressed in nicer clothes, or a nova with a competing entourage will enhance the social aspects of any scene for the players.

One Step Behind (AKA Group Dynamics)

Mega-Social novas do suffer one failing. They rarely cope well in all-out battle fests. This can be compensated by generalizing the character, or by working with the players to

ensure that the story and the character are appropriate for each other.

A Mega-Social player may believe that their fellow players should be in as much awe of their character as the NPCs. In a perfect world they would be, in the real world, your friends are looking at you from across the table, and trying to figure out when their character will next shine. It becomes a responsibility of the Storyteller to impress upon each player the significance of the role each player fills through out the story. Ideally every player would have such a moment in every session. Realistically the Storyteller may only be able to highlight two-thirds of the party every session.

One way to aid the fair and balanced implementation of this is through character analysis. Making note of specific situations each character excels, and at which situations each character seems their weakest will allow the Storyteller to craft encounters that push and pull each character in and out of their comfort zones and keep each player on their toes. [Note: It is important to remember that while it's okay to make a character uncomfortable, you should never intentionally make a player feel uncomfortable during a session, because of this some concepts that may seem a perfect fit for the characters, may be inappropriate for the players. Use your own discretion.]

Many players talk about balancing the party, making sure that they have a proper mix of offensive and defensive powers on their team. Storytellers should be having similar discussions, only they should be talking about having a balanced story. A balanced story is one that mixes the right types of conflict together so that all players are challenged and all players have an opportunity to shine.

Boorish Human Syndrome

Mega-Social novas are sometimes penalized and punished accidentally by well-intentioned Storytellers. It's time to fix this situation and double our efforts to intentionally punish the Mega-Social novas where it hurts. That's right, punish them with parties. For most novas life is full of parties, and social events and the Mega-Social nova can become the life of most parties, but rarely is the nova exposed to parties that are just plain awful. A creative Storyteller can challenge a nova's self image and perceptions by exposing them to a party scene they cannot fix, or by cloistering them with the most Neanderthal of hosts. A wise Storyteller will make this situation even rougher, by hinging a plot point on their being good guests at the party. A cruel Storyteller will find ways to share the horror of the awful party in great detail and to drag the less-social novas into it. It is through the social scene that a Storyteller can inflict the greatest harm by making the nova endure the boorish baselines and the fan-boys of their scene.

Conversely, a Storyteller can make parties the high points of a story, instead of the quickly forgotten down time between missions. By placing the nova in the spotlight or surrounding the nova with gushing fans and friends, adding a mix of celebrity cameos and gossip mills, it can all build into a party the player may not forget soon, and offers many possible story hooks to the characters. Imagine the players shock of meeting a member of Team Tomorrow "off-duty" and actually liking the person, only to find out they are a sociopath on the battle field. Or when

they are asked to retell their version of a previous mission's battle, and getting caught embellishing their story?

The Dark Side of Mega-Social Power

Poisoned Words and Razored Tongues: Psychological Torture and Grifters

In the Nova Age, the possibility of being tortured is a risk that only the most powerful of novas don't have to worry about. While a very workable system for this distasteful matter has already been provided in **Aberrant: The Directive** (on pg. 62 of that sourcebook); it didn't cover what can happen when a Mega-Manipulative nova engages in acts of psychological torture, nor did it differentiate much between physical and psychological torture. The game mechanics and information presented below should let the Storyteller add a very dark shadow to an **Aberrant** chronicle, if that's what she and her players want. But be careful – this is extremely dark and nasty territory that we're covering here. If using this material in your chronicle would cross the boundaries of what you, your fellow players, or your Storyteller feel comfortable dealing with in the context of a roleplaying session, then it shouldn't be used. It's that simple. And as always, Storytellers and players who want nothing at all to do with this matter are free to ignore it entirely.

Sticks and Stones May Not Break Your Bones, but Words Really Can Hurt You

For purposes of these rules, "psychological torture" is defined as verbal assault intended to inflict severe emotional trauma and anguish, most often as a form of punishment or coercion. While this form of torture leaves no physical marks on the victim's body, the emotional scars can (and likely will) last for the rest of the victim's life. The basic form of psychological torture is indeed the classic demoralizing put-down, although by no means is it limited to simply making someone feel badly and ashamed about himself. It's also about destroying what the victim considers to be the good things in his life. Such gambits include things like convincing the victim that his spouse doesn't love him anymore and has left him, for example. Breaking the victim's heart with "ironclad" evidence that his spouse has been unfaithful to him is another tried-and-true method. To make the victim feel utterly helpless and impotent, force him to watch as his loved ones are hurt or even killed. If the victim values his status in society, have him witness other people – especially personal rivals – take the credit for his achievements, slander his good name and reputation, or drain his hard-earned financial resources dry. If the victim has strong faith in his ideals, his religion, his friends or himself, then cause him to lose it. Destroying an item, place, or institution that the victim cherishes or is even just sentimental about can be surprisingly effective. And of course, dashing any hopes that the victim might have for

the future of himself and/or his loved ones has always worked well.

It should be noted that it's usually much more convenient for the torturer to simply trick his victim into thinking that such vile acts have taken place by means of well-crafted illusions and/or Mega-Manipulative deception than to actually have those acts committed. Provided that the victim has been sufficiently isolated from the outside world, all the torturer really needs to do is to convince the victim that such acts have indeed taken place. This has the added effect of making the victim feel quite foolish and humiliated once he discovers how the torturer has deceived him.

The Grifter's Gift

At its most basic level, Mega-Manipulation is the superhuman ability to influence other people. Since the system of game mechanics presented in the Aberrant core book considers torture to be a specialized form of the Interrogation Ability, it's logical that Mega-Manipulative novas would make the most efficient torturers. As such, grifters trained in the methods of psychological torture are capable of inflicting such horrific verbal attacks on a victim's psyche that the sheer pain can match that caused by the most brutal physical tortures known to mankind. In game terms, a Mega-Manipulative nova can be much more efficient at performing psychological torture than his baseline counterparts, and is able to break a victim's will far more quickly. When employed by a baseline torturer, an entire day-long session of psychological torture is typically required to strip the victim of one point of his effective Willpower. For a Mega-Manipulative torturer, the required length of a session of psychological torture is reduced to one hour. If the Mega-Manipulative torturer has either one of the Persuader or Trickster enhancements, the required session length is shortened to a period of 10 minutes. Mega-Manipulative torturers with both Persuader and Trickster can further reduce the required session length to a mere five minutes.

Talking Someone to Death: Inducing Suicide

Considering the horrifying amount of psychic pain that a Mega-Manipulative torturer can inflict on a victim, it should come as no surprise that such a grifter can also make a victim feel that he has no other choice except to commit suicide. In order to do this to a victim, a grifter must first gain detailed knowledge of the victim's insecurities, fears, and character flaws. A psychological profile of the victim may provide some useful information for a would-be torturer, but telepathic probing of the victim's mind is easily the most efficient method. By focusing on those weaknesses during the following sessions of psychological torture, the grifter can send the victim into a storm of personal self-loathing and insecurity while simultaneously inflicting enough emotional pain that his coping mechanisms cannot function. When (or if) the grifter manages to reduce the victim's effective Willpower to zero through this specialized form of psychological torture, the victim will then eagerly commit suicide, provided that he has the means to do so. Some victims will be more resourceful in this matter than others- if there isn't a razor blade or shard of broken glass

handy, a victim might even manage to swallow his own tongue and suffocate himself.

The Seeds of Vendetta: Survivors

There is no better way to ensure another person's utter hatred of oneself than to subject him to torture and let him live afterwards. If a victim survives being tortured, then he is certain to have come out with serious physical and/or psychological damage, along with the possibility of having lost a point of permanent Willpower. If the former victim ever gains hold of sufficient power and/or influence, then he will be certain to do anything he can to destroy the person(s) who tortured him. And that's just when the victim is a baseline. At the Storyteller's discretion, psychological damage suffered by nova victims of torture may result in the nova gaining temporary or possibly even permanent Taint. Finally, there have been instances of novas erupting as a result of being tortured. All of these factors can result in the former victim's torturer suffering severe injury, imprisonment, death, or even being tortured himself! Given that civilized 21st Century society views torturers with a horrified contempt at best, any who practice this skill should never expect sympathy.

Brainwashing in the Nova Age

In the World of **Aberrant** danger lies in the shadows, and sometimes it reaches out to corrupt those that dwell in the light. Mega-Social novas have great powers and abilities. While the Grifter is thought of a manipulative threat, where they can torture information from any baseline in hours, they are only the tip of the iceberg. The following section details an even darker side of social interaction and introduces the mechanics for brainwashing.

Getting with the program

Once a PC or NPC has been sequestered by the brainwasher or programmer, they are then subjected to various will sapping experiences (torture, sensory deprivation, or hours of Teletubbies). A programmer needs a strong understanding of intimidation and psychology (Requiring a Medicine skill of 3+ and Intimidation 4+, the specialization in brainwashing is optional) so that they may best customize their techniques for their victim.

There exist many forms of brainwashing as well as many techniques to break the will of a victim. Instead of going into great detail, a general categorization will follow. For the sake of simplicity brainwashing techniques are grouped into either Physical or Mental groupings.

Physical Brainwashing Techniques

Physical techniques are those that affect and drain the body's reserves to weaken the victim's mind. These techniques include such things as sleep deprivation, malnourishment, physical discomfort (tight space, low ceilings, uncomfortable clothing), lack of clean air, auditory overload, extreme darkness

or light, lack of sanitary facilities. These techniques make the victim's physical senses and processes work against the mind's reserves.

Mental Brainwashing Techniques

Mental techniques are those that directly attack the victim's mental processes to breakdown their sense of self and identity. The use of hallucinogenic drugs, amphetamines (speed, concentrated caffeine), and other chemical cocktails are often used to disassociate the victim from their sense of self. Mental grief or fear can empower a programmer to change a victim's thought processes. Constant denial of a victim's identity, by calling them another name and torturing them until they acknowledge it (Orwell's *1984* is a great write-up of such mental warfare), can wear a victim's will as well begin the process of reprogramming their subconscious. These and many other psychological plays are used to destroy the victim's resolve.

For novas certain alternatives exist for nova programmers and nova victims. First of all any programmer that has a way to deactivate a nova's quantum gifts may use any traditional brainwashing technique. Novas and baselines lacking mental shields can of course become victim to direct mental manipulation by psychic nova programmers.

Nova victims possess multiple opportunities to improve their chances of surviving a torture session. Depending on whether the programmer is using either a physical or mental tact will determine which abilities or powers the nova will need. Against physical torture novas with Mega-Stamina are fortunate, it will take exceptional amounts of suffering and lack of rest to have any meaningful impact, and novas with the Adaptation enhancement are immune to most traditional techniques. Against Mental torture the ideal defense is more complex as the programmer can either attack the Intellect or the personality (i.e. the Intelligence or the Charisma) though a few broad defenses do exist. Victim's with the Mega-Intelligent enhancement of Compartmentalized Mind are able to completely seal a portion of their mind from the entire process of torture and brainwashing, while those with the Mega-Perception enhancement Sensory Filtering from **Aberrant: Brainwaves** would be able to ignore entire spectrums of punishment. Novas without those enhancements will often have to resort to traditional resistance via pure Willpower, although with Storyteller approval focused attacks against the intellect may be resisted with Mega-Intelligence dice that can reduce difficulties, as with focused attacks against the sense of self or personality Mega-Wits or Mega-Charisma may assist in reducing the victim's difficulties.

Programmers with Mega-Social and Mega-Mental enhancements have a deadly edge over their patients. With Mega-Intelligence's Analyze Weakness and Medical Mental Prodigy, with Mega-Manipulation coupled with Creeping Paranoia or Overwhelming Question a programmer may demolish even a physically invulnerable nova (a Storyteller is free to add difficulty penalties to a nova suffering from these sorts of assaults). Just as Mega-Charisma aids a programmer in the reprogramming phase, by making the programmer the center of attention or at least the victim's source of inspiration,

Mega-Perception and Mega-Manipulation in a victim may save their sanity and their mind from a determined brainwashing session.

The Process

Every day the programmer works on brainwashing their victim they make a Charisma + Intimidation check, and every day the victim is successfully subjected to the brainwashing they must make a Willpower check. If the programmer succeeds, they have broken the victim a little bit more and their effective Permanent Willpower is reduced by one. If the victim succeeds then they negate any lost willpower that day. This is not a victory for the victim, since all they have done is delayed the final outcome by a day or two at most. The programming process does not have to be run daily, but every day between sessions allows the victim a chance to regain some of their willpower.

For Example, *Captain Ego has been captured by his nemesis Evil Id. Evil Id is hoping to break Captain Ego's will and turn the good Captain into an ideal villain. Evil Id has studied the Captain for months and believes he has identified the Captain's true Nature – A Caregiver. Evil Id begins a regiment of sleep deprivation, minimal food rationing, daily drug injections, and worst of all an endless looped video of ego-crushing babble. Evil Id is confident that the Captain's Willpower will be squashed within the month. Every day that Captain Ego is subjected to effective torture he must make a standard Willpower check (rolling 7 dice he nets a success (3, 6, 8, 4, 6, 4, and 5) while Evil Id also rolls a success with his Charisma + Intimidation check (7, 7, 7, 5, 6, 0, 2, 3). Since Captain Ego also succeeded his Willpower remains undiminished. Looks like Evil Id needs to make the confinement rougher on the good Captain.*

Novas with the Mega-Stamina enhancement of Adaptability will be immune to most traditional weakening techniques, since the enhancement negates the need for nutritional and sleep requirements almost indefinitely, though if the environment is harsh enough the Storyteller may require quantum expenditures. Novas with certain Mega-Perception may be able to thwart specific sensory deprivation techniques, though programmers with sufficient resources and technology may still find a way to effectively blind the senses of the nova. The Mega-Intelligent enhancement Compartmentalized Mind, on the other hand grants no immunity to the techniques but would permit a victimized nova to withstand an entire session by hiding their mind from it.

Nova programmers can use their powers and enhancements to improve their brainwashing techniques. The Mega-Intelligent enhancement Analyze Weakness, among others, can reduce the time needed to find an effective will sapping process.

For Example, *during the first week of his brainwashing, Captain Ego seemed unresponsive to some of Evil Id's techniques. Using his Analyze Weakness enhancement, Evil Id discerns that Captain Ego possesses the Mega-Stamina and the Adaptation enhancement. While it makes most of his techniques ineffective his use of psychological torture will have to break the Captain. Fortunately Evil Id also possesses the Medical Mental Prodigy enhancement, and adjusts his psychological assault on Captain Ego. Captain Ego and Evil Id now continue their*

sequence of tests, only this time Captain Ego has an increased difficulty of +2, since Evil Id has found the right images and conversation to emotionally distress the Captain and his Hallucination powers are causing the Captain to question his normally stable senses. The good Captain will not last this much longer.

Rebuilding from Scratch

Once the victim's effective Willpower is reduced to zero, the programmer now has the enjoyable task of rebuilding the victim into the ideal person.

First the programmer must select a key trait or Nature of the new personality to be created. This new Nature cannot be the same as the previous Nature, otherwise the programmer risks negating the brainwashing. Every day the programmer makes a Manipulation + Medicine check. Every day that ends with a successful check, increases the victim's False Willpower, and adds a +1 difficulty penalty to the next check. The victim's final False Willpower may never exceed their Permanent Willpower before the process began, though the increasing difficulty keeps most baseline brainwashers from fully restoring the Willpower of exceptionally strong willed victims.

The first time the programmer fails to increase the victim's False Willpower, they have a choice. The programmer can tear the victim's willpower back down and start over (resetting the false Willpower difficulty) or quit satisfied with how strong they have made the victim's new personality.

Evil Id has finally reduced Captain Ego to a vegetative state (0 Willpower), where he is now a clean slate to be reprogrammed. Evil Id grins and begins creating the new and improved Captain Ego. First he selects a new Nature to instill in the heroic Captain, Evil Id believes that a Servile Nature would be best suited to his new sidekick, and begins laying the ground work for a Sycophant by setting Captain Ego with a Traditional Nature, hoping it will keep Captain Ego by his side even if he disagrees. Evil Id now makes his programming tests with his Manipulation + Medicine dice pool (Manipulation of 5, Mega-Manipulation of 1, Medicine of 5). Rolling 11 dice the first time, the doctor succeeds easily and crafts the first False Willpower point into the new Captain. Evil Id could quit now, but chooses to continue reinforcing the new personality. This next test has a +1 difficulty. Using his Mega-Manipulation die to reduce the difficulty by 1, the evil doctor only rolls 10 dice against a now normal difficulty. Evil Id rolls a 1, 1, 2, 2, 4, 5, 7, 6, 9, and 8, easily succeeding in his second test (two days have passed). Evil Id having succeeded again chooses to continue improving his work the next day and rolls 10 dice against the continuing increasing difficulty +2 (reduced to +1 by Mega-Manipulation) and succeeds granting the new Captain a False Willpower of 3. On the fourth day Evil Id succeeds again against a modified difficulty of +2, but at the end of the fifth day he completely fails his test and is forced to cease his reprogramming. Now Evil Id has a decision to make stop here or spend the next four days removing his programming and starting over again. Feeling fairly content with his handy work Evil Id decides that Captain Ego is ready for prime-time. (Note that the highest that Evil Id could have raised Captain Ego's False Willpower is to 7, equal to Captain Egos Permanent Willpower.)

After months of effort, Evil Id has completed his meticulous work. It took the Evil doctor nearly a week of coaching and instruction, but he feels that he can no longer improve on his handy work. Evil Id releases Captain Ego, to see how his creation performs.

Testing the Bounds of Will

Now it is time to unleash the newly programmed victim. The first time a brainwashed victim is confronted with their old life by a person or a place, they must make a Willpower check using the difference between their Old Willpower and their new False Willpower (minimum 1 die), if they succeed they will weaken their programming and reduce their false Willpower by one point. Every time they are confronted by a situation or person that once held intense emotional significance to the victim they must make the check again. Until they reduce their False Willpower rank to zero they are still programmed and unable to shake the false facade. Careful programmers will instruct their brainwashed victims to avoid certain people to avoid these potentially healing encounters.

If the Nature chosen by the programmer is the same as the victim's original Nature, then the Storyteller must track when ever the victim recovers a Willpower point because of their current Nature. When this happens they get to roll a number of dice equal to the total Willpower recovered this way since their programming (max number of dice is their Original Permanent Willpower). If this test is ever successful, the victim immediately breaks their programming, and has their current Willpower pool reduced to 1 (assuming they have that many left).

If the victim is able to eventually reduce their False Willpower to zero, they can finally access their true identity. Unfortunately for most victims this realization is very painful as their equally clear recollection of their past actions under the influence of their programming is often highly guilt ridden. Considering that their Willpower is Zero, they are practically catatonic, though suicidal rage and self-destructive behavior is still quite possible.

Captain Ego's valiant teammates discover the Captain's return to the city and rush to his side, hoping they can stop his mad rampage. Captain Ego is quickly confronted by his old team mates as he is robbing the First Federal Bank. He hesitates on first seeing his good friends, and makes a Willpower test. Captain Ego rolls 3 dice (Original Willpower minus False Willpower, 7 - 4) versus a standard difficulty. Captain rolls a 3, 7 and 8. This gets him a success, and reduces his False Willpower to 3, and costs the Captain a turn, thus permitting his teammates to get the drop on him. That evening back at the Team's headquarters, Captain Ego awakens and begins plotting a way to escape, his schemes are interrupted by the arrival of a strange woman, she begins telling him about their supposed past and friendship. She claims she is his wife! Though the Captain knows she is lying, something about her does look familiar. The Captain is forced to make another Will Test upon seeing his beloved wife. Since his last test he now has 4 dice to roll (Original Willpower minus current False Willpower 7-3). He once again succeeds in his test, but still refuses to acknowledge his true identity. Over the next few days he is exposed to familiar faces and conversations about his past. Eventually his brainwashing is broken.

The victim may now begin recovering. After 24 hours of quiet rest they will automatically regain one Permanent Willpower point back (this is a reward for their hard won recovery). The remainder of their Willpower may take much longer. Every day they spend in peaceful conversation about their experiences with a skill psychologist or close friend (someone with Medicine 3+ or Rapport 3+) they may regain one Permanent Willpower, and may continue doing so every day they relax and focus on their old life.

Until the victim regains all of their Willpower back they will suffer from debilitating flashbacks of their brainwashing experience, though no clear information will be perceptible as it is still to painful, but once they regain all of their Willpower they can chose to force the memory forward. This will often reveal the true identity of their programmer, and perhaps lead to a wrathful hunt (after all the programmer will have had a few days to disappear).

After nearly a week of trials and painful confrontations Captain Ego finally breaks free of his programming and realizes who his true enemy is, Evil Id! But the good captain is not prepared to fight Evil Id. He is too drained, perhaps in a couple days...

A Victim's Worst Nightmare

If the victim does not fully break their programming before being collected again, their programmer may reinforce the programming by one Willpower point every day they are being reconditioned. This requires proper equipment and environment and the programmer must make a contested roll of Manipulation + Medicine, as the victim rolls a dice pool equal to the difference between their False Willpower and their original Willpower. The new result may not be higher than the previously achieved level. Though the programmer can always choose to break the victim all the way back down to zero and rebuild their Willpower from scratch.

Difficulty Modifiers for Victim

- +1: Victim is starved or only given subsistence nutrition for the previous day.
- +1: Victim is sensory deprived for previous 24 hours.
- +1: Victim is physically restrained for previous 24 hours.
- +1: for every day victim is denied sleep after the first.
- +1: if victim is in a hallucinogenic state.
- +1: Victim is emotionally distraught.
- +1-3: Victim's psychological attack is optimized using Analyze Weakness.

Note: Time periods are given assuming no Mega-Stamina. Novas with Mega-Stamina will have to be deprived for longer periods.

Difficulty Modifiers for Programmer

- +1: Programmer lacks proper facilities
- +1: Programmer lack personal information about the victim.
- +1: for each day spent away from "sessions" after the first day.
- +1: for each false Willpower point added.

Tweaks

For those Storytellers that wish to either increase or decrease the grittiness of the above system the following optional systems have been created: the **four-color tweak** and the **dark tweak**.

• **Four-Color Tweaks:** These changes should reflect the optimistic, romantic aspect of the four-color setting. They shouldn't make brainwashing any less dark and disturbing, but they do make it something that can be corrected with much less effort than it takes to establish it.

All types of four-color brainwashing can be corrected with only modest effort by a skilled brainwasher or psychologist over a long weekend (A successful psychology or brainwashing test with a +1 difficulty). Nova brainwashers/psychologists can undo brainwashing with only a short speech and/or a few rolls of an appropriate power or Mega-Attribute. Four-color brainwashing takes a lot of time to perform, but is inherently quite unstable/fragile, allowing a hero or concerned friend to undo it with relative ease.

Four-color brainwashing is also fragile enough that a victim can throw off his/her reprogramming with sufficient mental/psychological stress. This allows others to use all kinds of deceptions in order to undo a brainwasher's hard work in one cataclysmic moment. An example would be forcing the brainwashed victim to witness the demise of their most cherished person or thing. This would grant the victim an opportunity to role their original Willpower with a +1 difficulty. A success would allow them to throw off the effects of their brainwashing. (The difficulty can be modified at the Storyteller's discretion, if the stimulus was especially powerful or particularly weak.)

Four-color brainwashing can also be thrown off if the subject is fortunate enough to possess the True Love Merit. If the brainwashing victim is reminded of his/her love – or better yet, is confronted with his/her beloved – the brainwashing can be undone more or less automatically, and without detrimental side-effects. In a four-color setting, love is supposed to conquer all. (The Storyteller may require a Rapport check to see if the reunion is poignant enough, or if he just wants to be mean.)

Victims with an extremely strong sense of their identity – who they are, what they stand for, and so on – can also throw off the effects of brainwashing if reminded of their former identity, in much the same manner as a victim with the True Love Merit.

• **Dark Tweaks:** In this version, the effects of brainwashing are harder to resist and/or correct, making it a much more serious and frightening threat to the players' characters (and to their characters' loved ones). The fragility of baselines (in comparison to novas) is also somewhat played up in this version.

Baselines simply cannot "throw off" the effects of dark brainwashing, regardless of what Merits they might have. Mundane dark brainwashing of baselines can be corrected via both mundane and Inspired methods, although Inspired methods can be more effective and less time-consuming at the Storyteller's discretion. Inspired dark brainwashing of baselines is effectively permanent(!), in much the same way that baselines cannot heal aggravated damage. Mundane methods are useless in correcting Inspired dark brainwashing of baselines – don't even

bother to roll. Inspired methods may or may not be effective in correcting Inspired dark brainwashing of baselines (Storyteller's discretion). If they are effective, Inspired methods are sure to take as much time to correct the brainwashing as would a baseline psychologist using mundane methods to correct mundane brainwashing.

Novas (and other Inspired beings) cannot “throw off” the effects of dark brainwashing either, unless the victim in question has certain Mega-Attributes/enhancements/powers that would provide some resistance to brainwashing (as detailed above). Mundane dark brainwashing of novas can be corrected with mundane methods, but Inspired dark brainwashing of novas can only be corrected with Inspired methods.

For Example: *Big Eddie and his twin brother Almun-hotep are both novas and have been kidnapped by their personal foes (Mesmo and Dr. Collins respectfully). Mesmo uses his Hypno-Ray to aid in his brainwashing of Big Eddie, while Dr. Collins uses traditional brainwashing techniques on Almun-hotep. Big Eddie will only be able to break his brainwashing with inspired assistance, while Almun-hotep may actually escape his mental bonds through traditional mundane aid.*

At the Storyteller's discretion, novas that have both some form of resistance to brainwashing along with either the True Love Merit or an extremely strong sense of their identity might – just might – be allowed to throw off the effects of dark brainwashing in the same way as in the four-color version of brainwashing. This should be rare at best, although given that novas are literally one-in-a-million to begin with, that isn't really saying very much.

Resisting Brainwashing

In any version of the brainwashing system, it is possible for a subject to be trained to resist the effects of brainwashing (by expert brainwashers, of course). This would require the subject to possess dots of the Interrogation Ability, with the “Resistance” Specialty. Such a subject would be able to make a Manipulation + Interrogation roll whenever someone makes a roll in order to brainwash him. Each success the subject scores on the Manipulation + Interrogation roll will negate the would-be brainwasher's successes on a 1-to-1 ratio.

- **Four-color version resistance:** The training to resist brainwashing is effective against all forms of four-color brainwashing, regardless of whether the subject is a baseline or a nova. (Trained novas with Mega-Manipulation will still be better at resisting brainwashing than anyone else, though.)

- **Dark version resistance:** The degree of a subject's resistance to brainwashing depends on two factors: whether or not the subject is a nova (or other Inspired being), and whether or not whoever trained the subject to resist brainwashing did so via mundane or Inspired methods. Baseline subjects can use this game mechanic to resist mundane brainwashing methods, but it's useless against Inspired brainwashing methods. It also does not matter what methods were used to train a baseline subject. Nova (or other Inspired) subjects can only use this game mechanic to resist mundane brainwashing methods if they were trained via mundane methods. Nova subjects that have been trained via Inspired methods and/or who possess some form of innate resistance to brainwashing can use this game mechanic to resist both mundane and Inspired methods of dark brainwashing.

Storytelling Techniques

What follows are a few additional thoughts on Storytelling campaigns for Mega-Social novas.

- **Diary and Plot book** – A variation to Blue-Booking, Journaling or Diary writing can add additional dimensions to an on-going story. This permits a player to express the social pressures their character is feeling and grant them opportunities to talk about their character's current emotional and personal struggles. It also grants the Storyteller insights into new potential story hooks that can be specialized for the Mega-Social character.

- **“A Continuing Story of a Nova, gone to the Terats...”** – Soap Opera Styled campaigns, not for the faint at heart, or the easily jaded. To the glee and terror of many Storytellers, Mega-Social novas are ideal characters to introduce Soap Opera tactics. The recurring love triangle, the missing sibling returned, or the classic, “I'm not really your father”, all have a place in the social worlds of novas, and seem to be enhanced by the quantum powers involved. One only has to watch one of the weekly Soap Opera digest programs to see how to run such a story, and how to keep it from degenerating completely. [Note: If no one is using their quantum powers against fellow players after three sessions, you haven't had enough betrayal or backstabbing]

- **Solo and Duo games** – This anti-social version of Mega-Social role-playing allows the players to focus on their own individual social arenas. It also allows for a Storyteller and one or two players to explore the equally dangerous, though less physically damaging, world of social conquest and competition. This style of play works very well coupled with the Diary system.

CHAPTER FOUR: FRIGHTENING, WONDERFUL BEHAVIOR

Mega-Social Attributes

In comparison to their astonishing physical and mental abilities, the social abilities of novas appear to occupy a middle ground. Depending on how a Mega-Social nova uses them, they can be as blatant as a Mega-Strong punch or as subtle as a Mega-Intelligent scheme. The social abilities of novas also have incredible potential for altering society. The question of whether that potential will be used for social progress or decay can only be answered by the individual nova. There is only one surety where the efforts of Mega-Social novas are concerned: Things will never be the same.

Overwhelming Appeal

There's a major stumbling block that often shows up when someone new to **Aberrant** tries to imagine the effects of having a Social Mega-Attribute. Just how much more memorable, manipulative, or charismatic is a nova with a Social Mega-Attribute in comparison to a baseline with a similar base Social Attribute score? While this problem has been touched on in **Aberrant: Brainwaves**, it's still common enough to warrant another mention. The best way to deal with this is to use Mega-Strength (the one Mega-Attribute that most people don't have trouble imagining at all) as a basis for comparison. According to the **Aberrant** core book, a nova with Mega-Strength 4 is capable of lifting 50 metric tons, whereas a baseline with Strength 4 can lift about 165 kilograms. It's only a small step from there to estimate how much more "social muscle" a nova with 4 dots in a Social Mega-Attribute would have than a baseline with 4 dots of the base Social Attribute.

Snowflakes and Blast Furnaces

A basic tenet of the Mega-Attribute rules is that when novas with a given Mega-Attribute compete, the nova with the higher Mega-Attribute wins 99% of the time. (For details on the other 1%, see pg. 155 of the **Aberrant** core book.) A consequence of this is that when a baseline pits his or her base Attribute against a nova's Mega-Attribute, the baseline has no chance at all of winning. So what does this mean when a Social Mega-Attribute is involved? A nova with Mega-Appearance is more attractive than any human ever born – Marilyn Monroe and Cary Grant don't even come close. A Mega-Ugly nova is more repellent than even the most severely deformed or disfigured humans. A nova with Mega-Manipulation will *never* fall for the scams or deceptions of a baseline. A Mega-

Charismatic nova's personal charm will undeniably surpass that of all the greatest political and religious leaders of human history. In all respects, the nova is superior to the point that any baselines in direct competition are overcome. There are two things to take note of in this situation.

First is the fact that a large percentage of the aforementioned social contests will be personal conflicts, and will be treated as such by the Mega-Social nova's baseline competitors. It's disturbingly easy for baselines to wind up turning their opponents in the social arena into rivals and even outright enemies. This reaction will be even more pronounced in baselines who are outshined by a Mega-Social nova, as they will likely have just cause (if only in their own minds) to resent the nova in question. Given the potential for wreaking serious emotional trauma that Mega-Social Attributes can offer, a baseline backlash against the offending Mega-Social novas (and possibly novas in general) can happen all too easily if steps aren't taken to curb such excesses. The second thing to note is that baselines are still capable of making achievements in the social arena. Baselines can still instigate social progress (or decay), seduce others, run scams and win the love of a potential spouse; it simply takes them more time to do so when compared to a Mega-Social nova.

This also begs the question of exactly who will wind up holding the reins of society at large – the baselines or the novas? On one hand you have the baseline Establishment, with all of its well-known failings and sins. On the other are the various possibilities for new societies offered by the novas, most of whom simply haven't been around long enough (only 17 years, as of 2015) to have established any sort of track record in the art of building a stable and sane society. And then there is the Aeon Society, whose attempts to remold baseline society into a utopia have suffered greatly from the recent Slider scandal. As of 2015, Aeon has lost much of its former credibility among both the nova community and several of the major governments. If anything can be counted on to happen in this situation, it's that the Establishment will refuse to let the novas (much less the Aeon Society) simply take over. This sociopolitical power struggle will prove to be one of the major factors that lead to the Aberrant War and the subsequent reshaping of the global power structure. It will also provide another impetus for the followers of the novas to join them in their upcoming Exodus. The devil you know may be better than the devil you don't, but he's still a devil. And is he really a better

option when the devil you don't know sometimes might not even be a devil at all?

Mega-Socials and Other Mega-Attributes

Contrary to the ideal of “style over substance”, most Mega-Social novas will also have other Mega-Attributes and quantum powers at their disposal. As with the Mega-Mental and Mega-Physical Attributes, Mega-Social Attributes have a tendency to appear together in a nova. They complement each other well, but also cause the nova to become increasingly removed from the limitations and outlooks of baselines. This changes somewhat when a nova develops Mega-Ugliness instead of the standard “attractive” form of Mega-Appearance, though. While Squids can use Mega-Manipulation without any trouble, they often have difficulties using Mega-Charisma on baselines. (This is most often reflected by the Taint-derived difficulty penalties on social interactions with baselines, but non-Tainted Mega-Ugly novas may be penalized as well. The details of this have been left to the discretion of your Storyteller.) Certain mentally-disturbed baselines, such as the deranged individuals who will form the first true aberrant cults (in the **Trinity** sense of the term) are excepted from this penalty – more often than not, they'll see eye-to-eye with the Squid.

Unsurprisingly, Mega-Physical and Mega-Social Attributes are often found together in novas. Many male Mega-Social novas develop Mega-Strength in order to reflect a masculine ideal, while female Mega-Social novas have found the ability to shatter rocks with a punch quite useful in dissuading unwanted attention. Mega-Dexterity is quite useful when a Mega-Social nova has to sneak out of (or into) a volatile situation. It's also handy for when the Mega-Social nova winds up having to run like heck away from someone! Among other obvious benefits, Mega-Stamina allows Mega-Social novas to keep to their often demanding schedules without dropping dead from exhaustion.

Mega-Social and Mega-Mental Attributes can also appear together in a nova, which has become a common nightmare among those baselines who hold positions of power. Despite the popular stereotypes of Mega-Social novas as gorgeous – if sometimes devious – bimbos, more than a few of them have developed quantum-enhanced intellects that allow them to use their augmented social influence to even greater effect. (See **The Riddle of the Sphinxes** in **Aberrant: Brainwaves** for details.)

Creating Mega-Social Characters

Are you planning on creating a Mega-Social character for your next **Aberrant** chronicle? Then there are a few things that you should take some time to figure out.

Let's start off with your character concept. Just what superhuman social feats do you think that your Mega-Social character should be capable of? Is your Mega-Social character extremely good in one specific area due to having most of his Mega-Attribute dots in a single Social Mega-Attribute, or is he more of a generalist? Does he have any of the other Mega-Attributes or quantum powers, or is your character a good

example of “style over substance”? How many nova points do you have to create your character? What sort of chronicle will your character be played in? Your answers to these questions will ultimately be what defines the role of your Mega-Social character, and whether or not he'll be playable. Make sure to consult with your Storyteller as to the nature of the chronicle beforehand to see if your character will be able to fit in. While an “ultimate lawyer” would go over well in a *Law & Order*-style chronicle, that quantum-enhanced shyster might be a little out of place in a game with lots of quantum battles and guerilla warfare.

Now you get to decide just what your nova does with his Social Mega-Attributes. Does he use his Mega-Appearance to work as a model or a Bollywood movie star? Can a Mega-Ugly nova manage to find acting work portraying alien monsters or demons, or will he be forced to find some way to work at home? Do you want your nova to use Mega-Manipulation to become the greatest lawyer of his time, or will he be the greatest swindler instead? Will he use Mega-Charisma to pursue a career in politics, or will his religious devotion cause him to take up a vocation as a priest... or as a cult leader? What one must keep in mind is that Mega-Social Attributes are entirely dependent on having other people around you and your being able to communicate with them. There's really not much point to playing a Mega-Social nova if he is also a Trappist monk and has taken the requisite vow of silence, or goes off into the woods to become a hermit.

One last thing you'll want to think about is how your nova's Mega-Social Attributes have affected his life. Has suddenly becoming superhumanly attractive and charming inflated the nova's ego, or has he managed to retain some humility? How does a Mega-Ugly nova deal with being shunned by most (if not all) of the friends he had prior to his eruption? Has developing Mega-Manipulation caused your nova to see most other people as gullible sheep, or does he want to show them the truths that they seem utterly blind to? The material in this chapter shows just how a nova's Mega-Social Attributes can alter his outlook on other people and baseline society as a whole. Your character might decide to join Project Utopia in order to help rectify the problems he sees in baseline society. Perhaps he'll become disgusted with baselines in general, and join the supposedly egalitarian nova society promised by the Teragen. On the other hand, he might decide to follow the trail that Thomas Sering and the Protectors have blazed and help build a new, better society somewhere far away from the barbaric mess that's laughably called “Terran civilization”. (For details on Thomas Sering and the Protectors, see pp. 176-178 of the **Aberrant Player's Guide**.)

Playing Mega-Social Characters

When playing Mega-Social characters, there are certain benefits and obstacles that will crop up on a regular basis. While the Mega-Social Attributes don't require quite as much forethought as the Mega-Mentals do, knowing about their perks and problems will make them that much more useful.

Advantages

The advantages of playing a Mega-Social nova revolve around having greater influence on the people around you, and what you can convince those people to do.

(**Note:** Novas with Mega-Ugliness shouldn't expect to enjoy all of these advantages in the same way that other Mega-Social novas do, for obvious reasons.)

- **On Being a People Person:** Mega-Social novas are the ones who are better at interacting with other people than any other characters. While this might not sound all that impressive when compared to the might of the Mega-Physical novas or the acumen of the Mega-Mental novas, take a moment to think about how easily ordinary people can be spooked by those novas. When you're a baseline, novas with the Physical or Mental Mega-Attributes can be downright scary. This isn't the case (at least, not immediately) with Mega-Social novas. A Mega-Attractive nova can allay the fears and worries of other people with only a winning smile. (Mega-Ugly novas have been known to smile as well, which tends to terrify those unlucky enough to be nearby.) Mega-Manipulative novas are the spin doctors supreme; all they need is a few moments of conversation to make baselines experience radical shifts of opinion. Mega-Charismatic novas can charm just about anyone they meet into seeing them in the best light possible. All of this adds up to Mega-Social novas having much more of a safety margin where their relations with baselines are concerned — provided that a Mega-Social nova doesn't abuse the trust and feelings of his or her baseline admirers... (Mega-Ugly novas enjoy no such safety margin, but have a much easier time getting baselines to fear and loathe them.)

- **A Little Finesse:** One of the other less-than-obvious advantages of the Mega-Social Attributes is that they can be openly used in an aggressive manner in a polite, civilized setting. This (usually) can't be done with the Mega-Physical Attributes — If a Mega-Strong nova punches an irritating person while in polite company, all he'll do is show himself to be an uncouth and loutish thug. (This will also likely result in the nova being brought up on charges — does “assault with a deadly weapon” sound familiar?) Why risk being brought up on charges when you can use your Mega-Social Attributes to crush your victim's ego instead? Save for the exception of Mega-Wits, the Mega-Mental Attributes don't tend to be of much immediate use, as they're mostly passive. This leaves Mega-Social novas as the undisputed masters of repartee and social combat. Sometimes it can be even more satisfying to send a rival packing from a party with a wicked quip instead of just kicking him through the wall. (For details on Mega-Social novas and their verbal conflicts, refer to **Social Combat** in Chapter Two of this book.) While it's possible for a Mega-Ugly nova to be accomplished at repartee, he had best find some way to disguise himself. It's hard to engage in banter and witticisms if the people you're trying to browbeat are too busy screaming and running for their lives.

- **Your Ticket to Ride:** When a person is exceptionally attractive or charming, he or she tends to receive better treatment from other people than is the norm. In the case of Mega-Social novas, this tendency is amplified to an almost ludicrous degree. Provided that they're able (and that they won't get themselves in trouble as a result), most people will go

somewhat out of their way to please a Mega-Social nova. If she can foot the bills — and most novas can around 2015 — a Mega-Social nova can expect to receive the most lavish treatment possible at restaurants, hotels, and other establishments. This happens on a personal basis as well — if a Mega-Social nova drops by a friend's house on a whim, his arrival will be seen as an exceedingly pleasant and welcome surprise instead of an unexpected burden. And of course, Mega-Social novas will rarely lack for romantic companionship (or even just a one-night stand) if they're in the mood for it. Indeed, the hardest part of dating for these novas is often choosing which one of their legions of would-be lovers to take out on the town! In many cases, Mega-Social novas sometimes won't even have to ask, as more than a few people will leap at the slightest chance of getting into their pants. This can lead to some interesting situations, especially if a Mega-Social nova becomes the focus of unasked for sexual attention when all he or she wanted was to ask where the flight terminal for the 11:30 flight to Prague is.

Mega-Ugly novas also have the capability to get other people to do them “favors”, although these tend to be more like offerings to appease a frightful monster instead of the tokens of affection and admiration that other Mega-Social novas receive. They usually don't receive offers of sexual favors either, unless the person who's making the offer is in mortal fear for his or her life.

- **The Rumor Mill:** The Mega-Mental novas might be the characters who know more than anyone else, but it's the Mega-Social novas who are the best at getting information out of other people. Ever since humans developed language, they've been incessantly talking with one another about other people and themselves. This also makes most people ill-suited to keeping secrets if they have no real incentive to do so. While it often means having to sift through enormous amounts of trivia, baseless rumors and sob stories; a Mega-Social nova can sometimes obtain very useful tidbits of information if he takes the time to listen to what the people around him are talking about. Mega-Social novas can also use the human love of gossip to spread all sorts of information (accurate and falsified alike) among the public by “word of mouth”.

Disadvantages

There are certain drawbacks to playing a Mega-Social nova, most of which result from the fact that Mega-Social Attributes by definition are focused on influencing other people, most of whom will be ordinary folks. Ways to work around these problems exist, however.

(**Note:** Novas with Mega-Ugliness are exempted from some of these problems, for obvious reasons. The particular drawbacks to playing a squid are mentioned in the Mega-Ugliness section of this chapter.)

- **Lovers, Not Fighters:** When creating a Mega-Social character, some people have a tendency to ignore matters of personal toughness and combat abilities in favor of increasing their social abilities. While this would be logical for characters in a combat-free chronicle, most **Aberrant** player characters are guaranteed to get involved in a combat situation at least once in a chronicle, if not every gaming session. Aside from the usual quantum battles familiar to **Aberrant** players; Mega-Social characters are likely to have to protect themselves from a whole array of dangerous folks such as stalkers, kidnappers, vengeful

enemies, jilted lovers, and assassins. While an untimely death could result in a Mega-Social nova gaining some posthumous fame and media attention, most characters in this situation would've likely preferred to live to see another day. Unless the chronicle you're playing in is strictly violence-free and focused purely on social dynamics, giving your Mega-Social character some serious defensive and offensive capabilities is a good idea. Otherwise a Mega-Social character can expect to either be relegated to the sidelines when the fighting starts or to wind up playing the part of the “beautiful damsel/handsome hunk in distress” on a regular basis. If that sounds like fun to you, your fellow players and your Storyteller, then go with it. If your fellow players object to your playing a physically helpless character, then don't spoil the game for them.

Defensive abilities should be your top priority, as they will be what keep your character whole & healthy. Speaking of which, it shouldn't be surprising for a Mega-Social character to have at least a few dots of Mega-Stamina – even if she only develops it so that she can party for days on end, the other benefits can provide a subtle edge. The enhanced Soak provided by Armor or Invulnerability can be helpful, but it's often better to keep an attack from hitting your character in the first place. Density Control – Decrease is excellent for this, as it allows a Mega-Social character the chance at a quick escape from a bad situation along with the protection. If the nova also has mental powers such as Mental Blast or Domination it's even better, as she can attack her assailants with relative impunity. Powers such as Hypermovement and Teleport are also good for making quick escapes. Matter Chameleon and certain forms of Bodymorph can also let the nova slip away from a battle with a good chance of being undetected.

As far as offensive abilities go, Mental Blast or Domination are excellent choices, especially as Mega-Manipulation can enhance the effects of Domination. There's nothing quite like forcing your foe to kill himself to end a fight quickly. Powers that create illusions also have definite usefulness in combat if used cleverly. The Age Alteration technique of Temporal Manipulation can also be used to terrifying effect in a fight, especially if the victim lacks Mega-Stamina. Powers like Quantum Bolt or a few dots of Mega-Strength make for great “aces in the hole”, especially if the Mega-Social character isn't known to possess them.

If your Mega-Social character truly has no other options, then there's always the tactic of keeping several highly-skilled combatants around (who are hopefully novas themselves) to act as bodyguards.

• **Friends Help You Move, Real Friends Help You Move Dead Bodies:** When you've got hordes of people who are willing and eager to do your bidding, it's easy to think that you can call on them at any time to do anything, anywhere. Unfortunately for the Mega-Social character, this just isn't so. Unless an individual is an Ally, Follower, or Contact (and has been bought via the appropriate backgrounds), a “friend” of a Mega-Social character will be only a casual acquaintance. As such these people will only be inclined to help the Mega-Social character if doing so 1 – won't put them at risk or get them in trouble, 2 – the favor is within their power to grant, 3 – granting the favor wouldn't be inconvenient, and 4 – the “friend” clearly stands to

gain some sort of benefit from the nova in return for the favor. This means that while a “friend” could assist with getting a Mega-Social character's elderly parents into an exclusive (and expensive!) retirement village, he wouldn't be likely to help the Mega-Social character in covering up her murder of the creepy guy she found in her house stealing her lingerie. Further information on Mega-Social characters and their casual acquaintances can be found in Chapter Two of this book.

• **Hell Has No Fury Like a Woman Scorned:** Or like a man that's been scorned, for that matter. Given the sheer number of people that a Mega-Social character (who isn't Mega-Ugly) is likely to attract, it's almost inevitable that he or she will wind up offending or hurting the feelings of more than a few people. (Not even a Mega-Social nova can please *everyone*!) Even if a Mega-Social character has a few dots of Mega-Charisma, there will always be some people who will hate and resent him, and we're not just talking about the Church of Michael Archangel here. The love of a woman who's just been dumped by her Mega-Attractive beau can easily turn into resentment (if not outright hatred) of her former boyfriend. The grifter that bamboozles someone's wife into having an affair with him isn't going to be well-regarded by her husband. And what of the person who's only a month away from getting married, only to have his or her betrothed suddenly leave him or her for an idol? Publicly humiliating someone has always been an excellent way to get someone angry, and no one can do that quite as well as a Mega-Social character. Then you have all the people that a criminal grifter will have victimized over the course of her career – are they going to remember her fondly? Certainly not! This isn't limited to baselines, by the way. Eloping with the husband of a nova is a sure-fire way to earn her animosity. Having a nova as a rival is almost guaranteed to make one's life harder. And what if it's another Mega-Social nova that the Mega-Social character upstages? Welcome to the plot hook bonanza, folks...

Of course, all of this depends on how a Mega-Social character treats the people around him. A little respect and consideration (when it's deserved, which is usually the case) can go a long way towards keeping the numbers of people who feel animosity towards the Mega-Social character to a minimum.

• **Life Under the Spotlight:** Ever since the first N-day in 1998, most novas in the world of **Aberrant** become celebrities soon after they erupt, unless someone catches the eruption on video and catapults the newly-erupted nova into stardom before she even knows what's happening. While instant fame can seem appealing at first, many novas quickly learn to appreciate the anonymity they had prior to their eruptions. Where they could once go to a mall and do some shopping in peace, now they're likely to be mobbed by fans. Where few people really cared all that much about their past, now they have investigative reporters busily digging around for any interesting tidbits, dirt, or skeletons in the closet that they can find. Where once they could go out on a date and not be bothered, now they're hounded by paparazzi. And privacy? Let's not even go there...

In the case of most Mega-Social novas, these effects are even more pronounced, since they're so much more telegenic and interesting to the public than the other novas. Sometimes it can seem as if the media, hungry for the wealth of the nova's

multitudes of fans, is determined to record and document everything possible about the life of a Mega-Social nova. And to make up for what the mainstream media can't find out, the tabloids will gladly provide an endless stream of barely plausible fabrications. It's one thing to be adored by millions of people, but quite another to find yourself being portrayed as a borderline lunatic with a failed love-life and plans to help the Teragen take over the world. More than one Mega-Social nova has learned to view the majority of the public with a healthy contempt for their gullibility, especially once it becomes obvious that 90% of the masses would prefer to believe an entertaining lie instead of the actual truth.

Taint and Social Mega-Attributes

Unless a nova happens to be one of the second-generation kids, he or she will have to deal with the risks of Taint accumulation. It's probably a good thing that Mega-Social novas often develop Mega-Intelligence as well, given that many of the aberrations a Mega-Social nova can develop are mental in nature. This makes the Taint Resistance enhancement a truly worthwhile investment... Since many mental aberrations can start as slight personality changes, a Mega-Social nova will often have no idea that something's wrong with her until it's too late. Physical aberrations developed by Mega-Social novas will typically be of the sort that draws attention of other people to the nova. Further details on the aberrations a Mega-Social nova might develop can be found in the individual Social Mega-Attribute listings in this chapter.

The other major problem a Mega-Social nova will have with Taint accumulation is the increasing difficulties in attempting social interactions with baseline humans. As the nova's permanent Taint rises, she will find herself exerting more and more effort to use her Social Mega-Attributes on baselines with her accustomed level of success. (This will become even more pronounced if the Mega-Social nova also engages in the Chrysalis – see **Aberrant: Teragen** for the details.) Unless a tainted Mega-Social nova is prepared to use the Soothe enhancement every time she has a social interaction with baselines, a time will come when she will decide to limit herself to interacting with her fellow novas. This won't be a problem for Terats, but the loss of one's legions of fans, groupies, and other admirers can be a serious blow to the ego of a Mega-Social nova.

As could only be expected, novas with Mega-Ugliness are again the exceptions to this. Most of them have already accumulated high amounts of permanent Taint, while the few who haven't are so phenomenally ugly that they often face similar difficulties when interacting socially with baselines. It's hard to miss something – in this case, the admiration of other people – when you've never had it in the first place.

Mega-Appearance: Idols

Humans have always paid close attention to physical appearances, both their own and those of others. As a result, those people who are deemed attractive are admired, desired, and envied by most of their fellows. The emergence of the idols, novas with Mega-Appearance, has taken this to the extreme. The superhuman beauty possessed by these modern-day Venuses and Adonises has made them darlings of the media and stolen the hearts of baselines around the world. For good or ill, they are the sirens of the Nova Age.

Exquisite Beauty

Arguably the most obvious Social Mega-Attribute, Mega-Appearance is also the simplest – it enhances all of the myriad and seemingly minor aspects of the human body that contribute to what we know as “physical beauty”. While literally millions of people (men and women alike) do whatever they can to enhance their appearance with special diets, cosmetics, plastic surgery and the like; novas with Mega-Appearance look better than any baseline supermodels to be found without any need for such extreme measures. Many baseline social commentators have compared the idols to living works of art. It's not an unreasonable description – given that all humans are “hardwired” to find looking at a beautiful person very pleasurable, merely catching a glimpse of an idol can dazzle even the most rational and disciplined person. And if that idol shows any interest at all in that person, he or she is likely to be reduced to a beatific daze. Is it any wonder, then, that most baselines (and many novas) can turn to putty in an idol's hands?

A Bed Of Roses...

It's also no wonder that Mega-Attractive novas tend to receive preferential treatment from most of the people around them – humans seem to instinctively want to please a beautiful person. Lacking any other data to go on; most people will tend to assume that a Mega-Attractive nova is more intelligent, more sociable and popular, of better character, and of higher social status than a less-glamorous peer. If she's smart, an idol can often have the world for her oyster, especially where matters of romance are concerned. Even in the 21st Century, many people (novas and baselines alike) still have a hard time believing that an evil mind can reside behind a beautiful appearance. Consequently, a sufficiently savvy idol can sometimes get away with committing even the most serious crimes – and not only is she less likely to be reported than other novas, she's also less likely to be accused or penalized if she is. Even if the idol winds up being penalized for her crimes, her punishment will more likely than not be a good deal lighter than would usually be expected. Certain baseline psychologists explain this as the long-standing belief that “beautiful people are better in every way – including inherent goodness – than ordinary people”. Despite being fallacious, this myth does help to explain why idols are often granted perks and gifts more appropriate to the god-kings of antiquity instead of mortal aristocracy. As all novas are larger than life, idols are often treated as being more than mere mortals – in short, as they're treated as living gods.

...Complete With Thorns

Ever since the early days of the Nova Age, baselines have fantasized about what the lives of the Mega-Attractive novas must be like. What they usually end up imagining is a mélange of Hugh Hefner-style hedonism, Robin Leach-style extravagance, a love life straight out of a paperback romance novel, and a supremely high quality of life possessed only by the greatest of historical royalty. *After all, they think, they're so wonderfully perfect that their lives have to be perfect too!* It's a nice fantasy — “champagne wishes and caviar dreams”, gorgeous young baseline groupies always eager for a night of passion — good times and the Good Life, as far as many baselines are concerned.

The realities of an idol's life, however, are somewhat different.

Being Mega-Attractive means that an idol will be desired sexually by many of the people that he or she will encounter in a social setting. While that sounds great at first, several drawbacks soon make themselves apparent. For one thing, there is no guarantee whatsoever that a person who is turned on by an idol's quantum-charged good looks will meet the idol's own criteria for a possible lover or significant other — the idol's admirer might be of the wrong gender, too young or old, be unpleasant in appearance or personality, or simply might be repulsive to the idol for one reason or another. Also, many of the status symbols that grant otherwise boorish and unappealing individuals high status in baseline society — extreme wealth, political power, academic achievement, descent from the upper social strata, being an influential figure in a powerful organization, etc. — often count for little to an idol. More often than not, those egotistical baselines are left dumbfounded — and sometimes resentful — when their displays fail to win an idol's affections. On the other hand, a baseline whom an idol becomes romantically interested in can fail to see the idol's courtship of them as being honest. With both a head filled with fantasies of what an idol's life must be like and a severe lack of self-confidence, some baselines simply cannot imagine any reason why an idol would have any real interest in them. With the popular belief that a Mega-Attractive nova could have anyone he or she wants, this situation can become quite surreal to the baseline in question. A few even go so far as to assume that the idol has dishonorable intentions towards them. While this pessimism about oneself can make a baseline reluctant to accept an idol's affections, it doesn't make winning the baseline over impossible. If an idol also has a few dots of Mega-Manipulation and Mega-Charisma, the process becomes that much easier. Then there's the fact that a large fraction of an idol's admirers will seek treat the idol as a sex object. While the more lusty idols don't have much of a problem with that, those who are less hormone-driven quickly tire of being wanted only for impersonal sex instead of a healthy romantic relationship. Making things even more difficult is the tendency of many people to constantly misinterpret any simple gestures of friendship the idol might make as signs of sexual interest or seduction attempts.

Despite what one would think, idols are sometimes rather lonely, since they can find it extremely difficult to establish and maintain lasting friendships. By definition, a Mega-Attractive nova's good looks are far beyond the “1-to-10 scale” commonly

used in the singles scene. Potential sexual rivals will tend to feel envious of and/or threatened by the idol's superhuman attractiveness, even if they're ostensibly his or her friends. Nobody likes to be outshined by a more attractive rival — they'd much rather outshine other potential rivals. Potential sexual partners will tend stare at the idol and otherwise act bizarrely. This becomes even worse if it's a friend's significant other that's getting flustered over the idol. It also makes Platonic friendships rare, as it's hard for an idol to keep things Platonic when the other person can't help but spend his or her time thinking about how to get into the idol's pants. After dealing with these types of situations for several years, some idols might get married in hopes of escaping from the singles scene and sending out the message that they are unavailable. Sadly, the sight of a wedding ring won't deter some people...

Another problem has to do with the stereotypes that some people will have about attractive people in general and Mega-Attractive novas in particular. If an idol is female, she'll quickly notice that some people will assume that she is sexually permissive and confident, and has a high sex drive. This stereotype is also extremely difficult for a female nova to discredit in regards to herself. Female idols are also thought by some people to make poor mothers — and given that there have been no publicly-known nova pregnancies, the matter is still considered to be strictly academic.

Male idols have their own stereotypes to deal with. Most baseline women don't automatically assume that a male idol is a skilled Don Juan with a superhuman libido, although a few of them may fit that description. No, the major problem for male idols is that their superhuman handsomeness can inspire much jealousy among baseline men and other male novas who lack Mega-Appearance. The various derogatory remarks, insults, and epithets a male idol can expect to receive from envious rivals are too numerous to list here; but they can make the prospect of having “a night out with the boys” nearly impossible. Another problem is that while some male idols do reflect an ideal of “rugged masculinity”, others are disturbingly beautiful “pretty-boys”. Even in the 21st Century, some people still subscribe to the mistaken belief that “pretty-boy” idols are all homosexuals, regardless of their actual sexual orientation. The efforts of “Ironskin” Andy Vance and the QNA notwithstanding, as of 2015 these male idols are still liable to face anti-gay prejudice, especially in certain rural areas of the United States. This can result in some truly ugly situations, but most “pretty-boys” come out none the worse for wear. The same can't be said for their baseline antagonists, though...

There are a few other drawbacks to being an idol. Like attractive baselines, Mega-Attractive novas are sometimes seen as being less prone to maintaining their fidelity in a relationship, and as more likely to instigate a divorce. Some baselines (and even other novas) will experience feelings of personal inadequacy when confronted with an idol's good looks, and will be hesitant about approaching the idol in question or attempting even the simplest social interaction with the idol. An idol's superhuman beauty can very easily distract other people from any other valuable qualities that he or she may have, which can lead to much frustration on the idol's part. Being Mega-Attractive doesn't automatically make other people see an idol

as having integrity, being sensitive, or being compassionate. Finally, there are always some people who despise their beautiful fellows for one reason or another — and if they loathe beautiful baselines, then how much more will they hate a Mega-Attractive nova?

Roleplaying Mega-Appearance

If you're intending to play a character with Mega-Appearance, take a moment to think about the really handsome guys or the drop-dead-gorgeous femmes you might have known. Now remember all the ways — both good and bad — in which other people would treat them. Did you know a beautiful woman that had practically all of the guys on the local rugby team begging her for a date? Or maybe it was her boss who was infatuated with her, to the point of committing sexual harassment? On the other hand, were you drinking buddies with the hunk who always seemed to have lovely ladies either hanging onto him or fighting over him every Saturday night? Or was it a “pretty boy” that you remember, mainly for all abuse that the local macho ne'er-do-wells (who were probably inbred to boot) tried to dish out to him because they thought he was gay? Did any of those beautiful people have an entourage of buddies, or were those potential friends too afraid of losing their love interests to someone much more attractive than they were?

That kind of treatment, both good and bad, is exactly what Mega-Attractive novas can expect to receive on a regular basis — only it's amplified to almost ridiculous levels. How does an idol deal with all of that? Does he take advantage of his Mega-Appearance and indulge in one-night stands seven days a week? Will a female idol be flattered at being courted by a business tycoon, or will she brush him off as an arrogant blowhard? Can an idol manage to make friends out of potential sexual rivals and keep them as friends, or will the idol ruin good marriages and demolish serious relationships without a care?

In the end, the biggest question about an idol is the same as for any other nova: will the idol use the power of his or her Mega-Appearance responsibly? Or will the idol test the limits of what superhuman beauty can let him or her get away with — and the limits of what the people affected by the idol's actions can tolerate?

The Bimbo Factor

One vital thing to remember about Mega-Appearance is that it only enhances a nova's good looks — it does not provide any of the social graces that's required to make the most of an idol's superhuman beauty. An idol who lacks Mega-Charisma will basically dispel any illusions of being thoughtful and charming that his Mega-Appearance might've fostered among other people the instant he speaks. If the nova is also lacking in Intelligence or Wits (ratings lower than 3), he or she will be swiftly categorized as a “bimbo-nova”.

(Storyteller Note: The myriad slang terms used for these quantum-powered bubbleheads vary greatly with the local culture and media. For reference, El Puerto from **Aberrant: Underworld** is a prime example of a “bimbo-nova”.)

New Mega-Appearance Enhancements

Additional enhancements that characters with Mega-Appearance may learn or purchase include:

Divine Visage

Prerequisites: Mega-Appearance at 6+ dots and Awe-Inspiring.

Baseline humans tend to have a hard time resisting the appeal of Mega-Attractive novas. This only becomes more difficult in the case of novas who manifest this enhancement, as their overwhelming attractiveness makes baselines see them as nothing less than divine beings. Even other novas are somewhat taken aback by the sheer beauty of a nova with Divine Visage.

System: The Mega-Attractive nova spends 1 quantum point and rolls her Mega-Appearance against the Willpower of any non-Inspired being who can see her clearly. (Thick smoke or other visual impediments sufficient to cause a minimum of +2 difficulty penalties to Vision rolls will be enough to prevent this enhancement from functioning.) If the nova scores more net successes on that roll, the subjects will experience a temporary ecstatic episode and intense feelings of spiritual transcendence — enough to make them suffer a difficulty penalty equal to [the nova's Mega-Appearance / 2, rounded up] on all of their rolls for the duration of the scene. What's actually happening is that the nova is stimulating certain regions of the subjects' temporal lobes (or equivalent structures in the brains of nonhuman subjects). The resulting psychological state is identical to a religious epiphany or trance and isn't necessarily pleasant; while one subject might experience visions of heavenly glory, another might experience a brief taste of hell and damnation. The exact results of an affected subject's ecstatic episode cannot be controlled at all by the nova with Divine Visage; it is entirely up to the Storyteller, who is encouraged to apply either version that she thinks a particular subject deserves. A side-effect of this is that all subjects who perceive the nova will invariably be left with the strong impression that he or she is a bona-fide divine being, regardless of whether they failed their Willpower rolls or not.

This enhancement also has a secondary effect on all beings (Inspired or not), who must roll their Willpower against the nova's Appearance in order to behave towards the nova in an overly-familiar, condescending, insulting, or hostile manner. This secondary effect is instantly negated if the nova behaves towards a subject in any of the aforementioned ways herself. Divine Visage affects anyone who can clearly see the nova (line-of-sight), costs 1 quantum point to use, and lasts until the end of the scene.

This enhancement is restricted to Mega-Attractive novas — Mega-Ugly novas cannot take it.

(Note: For purposes of the “Eye of the Beholder” aberration, Divine Visage is the Mega-Attractive equivalent of Mind-Shattering Horror.)

Eidolon

This enhancement allows even the most basic details of the nova's Mega-Attractiveness to be seen through and reinterpreted by the individual desires of every person who can

see the nova. Aside from letting the nova assume the guise of “perfect romantic partner” to masses of people, it also prevents those people from getting a clear look at what the nova really looks like. Mega-Ugly novas have their own version of this enhancement, which uses people's fears and allows them to don the guise of “horrorifying nightmare” – and to make things worse, it provides the same protection against being identified.

System: The nova spends 1 quantum point to activate this enhancement for a scene. A Mega-Attractive nova will appear as a “perfect mate” to everyone who sees her, regardless of individual gender and/or orientation, and gains a + 3 dice bonus on Seduction rolls. A Mega-Ugly nova will appear as the “worst nightmare” of everyone who sees him, and gains a + 3 dice bonus on Intimidation rolls. Both versions of this enhancement make it extremely difficult to discern what the nova actually looks like. The nova's Mega-Appearance +1 is rolled against the subject's Willpower. Powers, effects, and devices that protect against telepathic illusions will add Willpower successes to the subject's Willpower. Those subjects who fail the Willpower roll will see the nova through their own personal likes or dislikes. The nova's subjects will be unable to identify the nova and will also disagree strongly with each other as to the nova's appearance and gender. Please note that unless the nova also has Almost Live (from the *Aberrant Player's Guide*), a nova using Eidolon cannot affect beings that are viewing him via video transmissions or recorded media.

This enhancement is available to novas with either version of Mega-Appearance.

Fade

While it hasn't become quite as pervasive as George Orwell feared, electronic surveillance is still widespread in the developed regions of Earth, circa 2015. Given that a person is likely to be monitored by at least one video camera in any public area (and in many private areas as well), the development of this enhancement was inevitable. Novas with Fade are virtual ghosts as far as electronic surveillance is concerned.

System: A nova using this enhancement is extremely difficult to detect or record by technological devices and effectively casts no reflection. This “cloaking effect” includes the nova's shadow and his clothes, but attempts to cloak anything larger should be handled with the Attunement Background rules. The nova spends 1 quantum point to activate this enhancement for a scene. While active, any attempt to capture the nova's image on video monitors, cameras (old-fashioned film or digital) or similar media (including motion detectors) has a +3 difficulty penalty. Alternatively, the nova may gain +3 successes for any Stealth, Intrusion, or similar rolls when dealing with electronic surveillance or detection. While the nova may choose to end the effect at any time, he cannot be selective. I.e. he can not choose to both have a reflection and at the same time avoid being recorded on film. Lack of a reflection can lead to consternation among superstitious people, and even your average citizen of the First World will likely find this somewhat disturbing. Where appropriate, Artificial Intelligences should treat this enhancement as the electronic version of the Incognito enhancement.

This enhancement is available to novas with either version of Mega-Appearance.

Halo Effect

For some reason, everyone considers a nova with this enhancement to be pure and innocent, though not necessarily naïve. This enhancement grants a Mega-Attractive nova a saint-like quality that is hard to pinpoint but cannot be denied. Unless confronted with direct evidence to the contrary, people will perceive the nova as being likeable and trustworthy, and will tend to confide in her. She will even tend to receive lesser punishments for wrongdoing, as people find it very difficult to think ill of her.

System: People who catch sight of a nova using this enhancement must roll Mega-Wits against the nova's [Mega-Appearance +1] to resist the Halo Effect. Those who fail will perceive the nova as described above. Novas lacking Mega-Wits and other Inspired beings can automatically shake off the Halo Effect after [the nova's Mega-Appearance] hours. Baselines automatically fail this roll, and may remain under the sway of the Halo Effect for years without Inspired aid or serious mental trauma. Furthermore, unless the nova has the Trustworthy enhancement (from the *Aberrant Compendium*), any subject (Inspired or not) who witnesses the nova committing some act that strongly contradicts her “saintly” image may make a Willpower roll at standard difficulties to shake off the Halo Effect immediately. This enhancement is permanent but can be turned on or off at will, and has no quantum point cost. This enhancement is also restricted to Mega-Attractive novas – Mega-Ugly novas cannot take it.

Immaculate

A Mega-Attractive nova with this enhancement will always look his best, regardless of his circumstances. The nova could swim in molten lava, crash through a building, withstand the blasts of cluster bombs, or even work on a pig farm and still look like he'd just stepped out of a fashion salon. If the nova is injured he'll still look as if there's not a scratch on him. Annoyances such as dirt, dust, and stains simply won't affect him or his wardrobe. If his clothes are damaged, it will only accentuate his good looks. Even if his hair is windblown or mussed, it always falls back perfectly into place.

System: The nova is immune to circumstantial Appearance penalties; and can suffer damage without appearing to bruise, bleed, or show any other signs of visible damage. The nova also gets an additional [Mega-Appearance +1] dice on all rolls where looking one's best could be a factor. The question of whether or not the effects of this enhancement can be overcome by a nova's quantum powers (or the powers of other kinds of paranormal beings, such as psiads) has been left to the Storyteller's discretion.

This enhancement is always in effect, and has no quantum point cost. This enhancement is also restricted to Mega-Attractive novas – Mega-Ugly novas cannot take it.

Incognito

Novas with Mega-Appearance tend to be easily remembered. This enhancement prevents other people's short-term memories of the nova from being turned into long-term memories. As short-term memory only lasts for a minute or two, a nova with this enhancement can go everywhere, be identified everywhere, but still remain anonymous. Unlike Mr. Nobody,

Incognito doesn't make the nova unobtrusive, reduce Mega-Appearance, or prevent on the spot identification. It only prevents other people from remembering the nova.

System: The nova spends 1 quantum point and rolls Appearance. Anyone who later tries to recall details of the nova from the scene in which the Enhancement was active needs to beat the nova's rolled successes (usually on an Intelligence roll) to do so. Characters with Eidetic Memory get three extra dice on their roll. This enhancement is extremely subtle, unless someone was aware of this effect at the time it was in effect, they cannot spend Willpower on their memory roll. Similarly, since long-term memories never formed to begin with, telepathy and similar powers can not be used to help a person's memory roll. This enhancement does nothing to prevent the nova from being recorded on any form of media (photos, movies, digital video files, etc.), nor can it operate through video transmissions. Both of these problems can easily be remedied by use of the "Almost Live" enhancement (from the **Aberrant Player's Guide**). This enhancement only affects the people exposed to it.

Example: John Stupid has Incognito and activates it before he knocks over a building and kills two hundred baselines. When T2M shows up 10 minutes later, although all the witnesses agree that a nova must have done this, they don't remember which nova or what the nova looked like. John stays on site and appears in front of everyone who saw this. He figures that they won't be able to connect him to his crime. Unfortunately for John, one of the witnesses dialed 911 and gave the police his description before he forgot it. T2M easily matches him to his description and hauls him in on the spot.

This enhancement is available to novas with either version of Mega-Appearance.

Kawaii

It's no accident that most infants, children, and early adolescents are seen as being attractive by adult humans; it's part of a survival mechanism that increases the chances of children living long enough to become successful parents themselves. It was inevitable that some child and early-teen novas would manifest a quantum-amplified version of that essential mechanism.

The looks of a nova with the Kawaii enhancement has a quality that can only be described as "superhuman cuteness". All but the most heartless of people will treat a Kawaii nova with kindness and affection, and will become protective of the Kawaii nova if she is threatened. Some people may even engage the Kawaii nova in spontaneous displays of affection. In addition to making their parents (who are sometimes novas themselves) more willing to deal with the problems of raising a nova child, this enhancement has made some Kawaii novas instant media stars in the cuteness-obsessed popular culture of Japan.

System: This effect only works when the people it affects are in the nova's presence and looking at her; when they are away from her, this enhancement can't affect them.

A Kawaii nova receives 1 automatic success for each dot of Mega-Appearance possessed on any Social rolls where appearing cute, adorable, innocent, naïve, helpless and harmless could work in the nova's favor. While it can aid in tasks such as getting other people to help the nova or shifting others' suspicions away from the nova (provided that there's no direct

evidence linking the nova to her misdeeds), there is a downside to this enhancement. Kawaii novas automatically lose [the nova's Mega-Appearance /2, rounded up] successes on any Social rolls that require their being seen as a credible threat or as having competence, experience, or maturity. Also, this enhancement depends on the inherent immaturity of the Kawaii nova — once the nova reaches her 16th year of age she automatically loses this enhancement, which is then replaced with another Mega-Appearance enhancement of the Storyteller's choosing. Adult novas and teen novas of 16 years of age and older cannot possess this enhancement, even if they assume a childish form by means of the Shapeshift power or the Age Alteration technique of the Temporal Manipulation power.

Activating this enhancement costs 1 quantum point, and lasts for the duration of the scene. Players and Storytellers alike should keep in mind that Kawaii novas are almost unbearably cute even when not using this enhancement; people will make exclamations of delight and/or adoration on catching sight of them, give them hugs, ruffle their hair, etc. — basically treating Kawaii novas as the children they really are.

This enhancement is restricted to Mega-Attractive novas — Mega-Ugly novas cannot take it.

Two-Faced

Normally, a nova with Mega-Appearance becomes either Mega-Attractive or Mega-Ugly during his eruption, and is stuck with that result for the rest of his existence. However, a few novas have developed the ability to shift between the two opposing forms of Mega-Appearance at will. Aside from the obvious benefits in establishing apparently utterly dissimilar identities as two different novas, the shock value of seeing a Mega-Attractive nova suddenly becoming Mega-Ugly might aid a nova who's inclined to mischief in pulling off some truly mean-spirited practical jokes.

System: This enhancement allows a nova to switch from being Mega-Attractive to being Mega-Ugly (or the other way around) by spending 1 quantum point. The nova loses access to Mega-Appearance enhancements that are restricted to either Mega-Attractive or Mega-Ugly novas while using the opposing form of Mega-Appearance. (See "Banned Enhancements" in the Mega-Ugliness section for details.) The nova also doesn't gain any additional enhancements with Two-Faced, but may purchase them normally. (For example, a normally Mega-Attractive nova with Awe-Inspiring could not use it while Mega-Ugly, and would not gain a different enhancement to make up for that loss.) The effects of this enhancement last for a scene, and can be activated multiple times during a scene to switch back and forth. The nova cannot employ both forms of Mega-Appearance at the same time — it has to be one or the other. A Two-Faced nova must declare one form of his Mega-Appearance to be a "default visage"; to which the nova will revert to if sleeping, knocked unconscious, or incapacitated.

Note: A Two-Faced nova cannot have both of his visages based on the same form of Mega-Appearance; one must be Mega-Attractive, and the other must be Mega-Ugly. This enhancement is available to novas with either version of Mega-Appearance.

Unattainable

While human beauty is often thought of in terms of sexual appeal, there are some instances where extreme beauty can partially deter other people's sexual interest or even dampen it entirely. That effect is just what a Mega-Attractive nova with this enhancement is capable of. Given the number of overly-persistent suitors that a Mega-Attractive nova is likely to attract, this enhancement can prove very useful.

System: This enhancement costs 1 quantum point to activate, lasts for the duration of the scene, and only affects those people who have a sexual interest in the Unattainable nova. The people affected by this enhancement must also be in the nova's presence and looking at her, otherwise it will not function.

Any subject who has a Willpower score lower than the nova's Mega-Appearance will experience a sudden and severe loss of self-confidence. Instinctively sensing that the Unattainable nova is "out of their league", the subject won't be able to even socialize with the nova for the duration of the scene.

Subjects with a Willpower score equal to or greater than the nova's Mega-Appearance may make a Willpower roll against the nova's Appearance. Botching the Willpower roll results in a total inability to socialize with the nova. Failing the Willpower roll means that the subject's ardor is dampened, but he or she can still socialize with the nova in regards to non-sexual matters. If the subject gains even 1 success on the roll, he or she may behave towards the Unattainable nova in his or her intended fashion.

Storyteller Note: Novas with the Heartthrob, Sex Object, Object of Desire, or Romantic Irresistibility aberrations cannot use or develop this enhancement.

This enhancement is restricted to Mega-Attractive novas – Mega-Ugly novas cannot take it.

Yin-Yang

Ever wanted to see how the other half lives? Those novas possessing this enhancement can do so as they can change their sex at will. The change is a complete one; internal organs are changed along with the more obvious features and even the nova's scent changes. This enhancement is also very handy when being pursued, as few people normally confuse male and female bodies. Note, however, that this ability to change gender does not cause any additional radical changes in appearance; both sexes have similar features, and look sufficiently alike to be siblings.

System: It takes roughly one minute for the nova to make the change from one gender to the other and does not require a roll. However, an Appearance roll can be made to cut this time in half. It costs one quantum point to activate Yin-Yang, but once the change is complete there is no need to maintain this enhancement. It is as if the nova had always been of that gender.

Note: If a nova with Yin-Yang is not sterile, that nova can become pregnant while female if contraceptive measures are either not used or somehow neutralized. Yet another interesting wrinkle is that upon the moment of conception, a pregnant nova with Yin-Yang will find him – or herself locked into "female mode" for the duration of the pregnancy. Once the pregnancy

ends (through birth, miscarriage, or the death of the fetus), the nova will again be able to switch gender freely.

This enhancement is available to novas with either version of Mega-Appearance.

Mega-Appearance Aberrations

Aberrations derived from Mega-Appearance tend to reflect a desire for other people's favorable attention, and result in physical aberrations that increase the nova's chances of being noticed. (There *can* be too much of a good thing, though.) Mental aberrations that may be manifested are usually obsessions with either the nova's own good looks or beauty in general, although sometimes a loss of the nova's self-image will occur. The aberrations listed here are generally limited to novas with at least one dot in Mega-Appearance, but a few are available to Mega-Ugly novas – refer to the Mega-Ugliness chapter for details.

Common aberrations from **Aberrant** and the **Aberrant Player's Guide** for novas with Mega-Appearance include Aberrant Eyes, Albinism, Androgyny, Colored Skin, Fur/Feathers, Glow, Hairless, Hermaphrodite, Hormonal Imbalance (Lust), Obsession, Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder, and Unearthly Beauty.

Note: Aberrations marked with an * are from the *Aberrant Compendium*.

Low-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with four to five points of permanent Taint.

- **Aberrant Hair:** Something about the nova's hair is weird. While its color is more-or-less normal (providing that the nova doesn't also have the Chromatic Hair aberration), something about it simply isn't possible for baseline hair without extensive styling. The nova's hair might be stiff enough stand up naturally without the aid of hairspray or styling mousse; novas with hair that sticks up vertically for heights of 40 centimeters or more are not unheard of. The nova's hair might naturally grow in an odd style, such as a 1970s-style punk-rock mohawk or a lion's mane. Other possibilities include the nova's hair developing a metallic, rubbery, or plastic texture; or being uncomfortably warm or cold to the touch. Some novas' hair might actually move of its own accord! As the permanent Taint of a nova with this aberration accumulates, the nova's hair may actually change into something unsettling and problematic such as flames, stiff metal wires, or living snakes. (In these extreme cases, this aberration might only affect the hair on the nova's head – the Storyteller has the final say on this matter, as always.)

- **Chromatic Hair:** The nova's hair – all of it – is of a (usually) attractive color that isn't naturally found in baseline humans. Just about any hue is possible – bright blue, leaf green, cherry red, and pastel pink are just a few of the possibilities. Some novas even develop hair the color of polished metal – for example, Teardrop from Teen2M has bright silver hair. Other people get a -2 difficulty bonus to recognize a nova with this aberration – and unless the nova is around people as colorful (pun intended) as herself, other people will get a -2 difficulty bonus on all Perception rolls to pick her out of a crowd. Since baseline teenagers and nonconformists have been dyeing their

hair unnatural colors for over a decade (as of 2008), this doesn't draw quite as much attention as other minor physical aberrations do... unless someone gets close enough to the nova to realize that the supposed dye-job is in fact natural color! As the permanent Taint of a nova with this aberration accumulates, the color of the nova's hair will become ever-more striking and noticeable – some novas' hair might even glow like fiber optics! This results in an additional -1 difficulty bonus on rolls for other people to recognize or spot the nova per 2 points of permanent Taint the nova accumulates after manifesting this aberration. Oddly enough, several Japanese novas (and foreign novas who have been influenced by Japanese anime) have developed this aberration without the Taint that normally accompanies it. These novas also have been known to develop oddly-colored irises without Taint accumulation as well. (In game terms, these novas have taken both the Chromatic Hair and Aberrant Eyes aberrations as 1-point Flaws – see the **Aberrant Player's Guide**, page 92.)

- **Distinctive Looks:** Something about the looks of a nova with this aberration really stands out in the minds of those who see her (or visual records of her). Whether it's something as blatant as smoldering sex appeal or as subtle as how the light hits her, this makes the nova's appearance quite unique. Unless she takes extreme measures to alter her appearance (via shapeshifting or cutting-edge cinematic special effects makeup), she is likely to be spotted and recognized on sight by anyone who's seen her before. In game terms, other people (novas, baselines, and psiads alike) will gain a difficulty bonus on all Perception rolls made to identify the nova equal to her Taint-derived difficulty penalty on social interactions with baselines. On the flipside, all rolls made for attempts to impersonate the nova with this aberration likewise suffer a difficulty penalty equal to her Taint-derived difficulty penalty on social interactions with baselines.

- **Mega-Vanity:** Mega-Beautiful and Mega-Handsome novas who develop this aberration become obsessed with their personal appearance. These are the novas who simply cannot pass by a mirror without looking at themselves, and cleaning up their appearance if need be – even during combat! They dread the problems of aging (baldness, grey hair, wrinkled skin, sagging figures, etc.), and will seek to become very good friends with any nova capable of using the Age Alteration technique of Temporal Manipulation. Flattery works very well on these novas, making them more vulnerable to certain Manipulation-based skills (+1 difficulty penalty to resist such attempts). Insulting or marring the looks of novas with this aberration is guaranteed to anger them – they suffer a difficulty penalty of +1 on all their rolls until the insult is avenged and the damage (even if it's nothing more than having mud thrown in the face) is corrected. Mega-Vain novas tend to resent other novas who have greater Mega-Appearance than their own, especially if they are romantic rivals of the Mega-Vain nova in question. (They can appreciate the Mega-Appearance of potential romantic partners just like anyone else!) In all of these cases, a Mega-Vain nova can make a Willpower roll (penalized by his or her permanent Taint, of course) to resist the urge to give in to his or her vanity whenever it is felt, even when it isn't the best time to indulge. The Storyteller may adjust the difficulty if the

circumstances are especially tempting. The nova may spend a Willpower point to resist the effects of this aberration for one scene, but will feel distinctly uncomfortable doing so.

- **Quantum Beacon:** The nova's self-image has changed drastically from what it was prior to his eruption – he sees existence as a nova as being clearly distinct from baseline existence, overemphasizing the differences. As a result, the nova cannot have the Dormancy background and will have to deal with living as a nova 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As an added burden, anyone attempting to detect the Nova by any means, whether by Node, psionics, mental powers, devices, or even just by looking at him, receives the nova's taint in extra dice for their roll. Something about this nova just screams, “Here I am and I'm a nova”. A nova with this aberration also cannot have the “Mr. Nobody” Mega-Appearance enhancement. This aberration is especially common in those novas who were markedly deficient in some way as baselines; such as having physical deformities or birth defects, being an invalid or disfigured by a disease, or simply being born ugly. As these problems are usually corrected as a byproduct of the eruption process, the nova will understandably have no desire whatsoever to return to his previous baseline existence, even temporarily.

- **Sex Object*:** The nova is simply too attractive for his/her own good. Upon first meeting the nova, people attracted to members of the nova's gender must roll Willpower to avoid becoming lust-stricken by the nova and treating him/her as a sex object. The victim also suffers a penalty on the Willpower roll equal to the nova's Taint-derived penalty on rolls for social interactions with baselines. (If the victim is alone with the nova in a private setting, the roll is made with an additional +1 difficulty.) Those who succeed on the Willpower roll may act as they please. The actions of those who fail the roll will vary with their individual personalities – unabashed staring, deciding to stalk the nova, or simply acting like a blabbering idiot are all good possibilities. Those who botch the roll will seek to become intimate with the nova ASAP, although their tactics will vary with individual personalities, as noted above. Novas who develop this aberration often encounter jealousy from potential romantic rivals, for obvious reasons. When added to the difficulties of social interaction with someone who's determined to either become your significant other or get into your pants, it's not hard to understand why many such novas become recluses.

- **Strange Scent:** A nova with this aberration has a natural body odor that smells like nothing a normal human body is capable of producing. The scent can be literally anything, although Mega-Attractive novas will produce pleasant scents (such as roses, fresh sea spray, or cedar wood). Mega-Ugly novas produce unpleasant scents (such as sulfur, decaying flesh, or fresh sewage). Mega-Ugly novas will suffer an additional +2 difficulty penalty on Social rolls for interacting with baselines and less-tainted novas. Mega-Attractive novas will only suffer that penalty if the baseline or nova in question is allergic to or simply dislikes what would ordinarily be considered a pleasant scent. All attempts to track a nova with this aberration by scent are made with a -2 difficulty bonus.

- **Surreality*:** Other people (including other novas!) will tend to find a nova who develops this aberration to be

irresistibly fascinating. (Victims must make a resisted Willpower roll vs. the nova's Mega-Appearance to resist, with a difficulty penalty equal to the nova's Taint-derived penalty on rolls for social interactions with baselines.) If a victim succeeds on the Willpower roll, he or she may act as he or she pleases. If they fail, people will stare at the nova and attempt to strike up conversations at inappropriate times in hope of getting to know the nova better. Worse still, criminals and other people of a less savory nature will always choose the nova over other potential targets for their illicit acts.

- **Twisted Perspective:** Mega-Beautiful and Mega-Handsome novas who develop this aberration undergo a slight change in their ideas of human beauty. Having come to accept their superhuman attractiveness as the norm, such novas will find the unenhanced features of even the most gorgeous baselines to seem rather homespun, if not downright bland. Novas with this aberration have a -2 difficulty bonus to resist any seduction attempts made by baselines that are based on sexual attraction. The flipside of this is that these novas also have a difficulty penalty of +2 on all vision-based Perception rolls made to identify baselines by sight — after all, these novas likely won't even want to look at baselines if they can help it... As the nova's permanent Taint increases, so will the effects of this aberration — raise the value of the bonus (and penalty) by 1 point for every 2 points of permanent Taint accumulated after gaining this aberration.

Medium-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with six to seven points of permanent Taint.

- **Fashion Disaster:** A nova with this aberration has lost all appreciation of the importance of being dressed well (or of being dressed at all). While the nova can still understand why baselines place such emphasis on fashionable clothing in an intellectual, abstract manner, he will feel that engaging in such displays himself is pointless and/or ridiculous. From the nova's viewpoint, for him to indulge in such behavior would be the equivalent of an adult dressing and acting like a small child — and since when do adults take the opinions of little children on how (or if) they should dress, anyway? Novas with this aberration will dress in either utilitarian clothes or whatever attire the nova deems comfortable — if the nova also has the Adaptation enhancement and the Armor power, this may mean going around in little clothing or none at all! Given the importance that baseline society places on wearing whatever clothing is considered fashionable at the time, this aberration can cause the nova serious social difficulties — after all, most baselines tend to take silly things like dress codes, fashion trends, and laws regarding indecent public exposure quite seriously. In game terms, the nova's taint-derived penalty on Social rolls for interactions with baselines is doubled for all rolls where wearing appropriate clothing is a factor. If someone (not necessarily another nova) whose opinion the nova respects attempts to convince him that he should wear appropriate clothing to an event, the nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to her permanent Taint) in order to follow that person's advice for the duration of the event. (The nova will get himself out of that “ridiculous get-up” ASAP once the event is over, however!)

Note: Depending on the circumstances, the increased difficulty penalty imposed by this aberration may not apply in some situations — a nova who insists on wearing 1970's-style leisure suits wouldn't be looked down on by people with similar tastes, while a Mega-Attractive nova who hates wearing any clothes at all would be well-received at a clothing-optional beach or a nudist colony.

- **Heartthrob*:** The nova is absolute dynamite when it comes to infatuating those people attracted to members of the nova's gender. The problem is that the nova is like this all the time, and can't turn off his or her sex appeal... (This should be restricted to novas with the Seductive Looks enhancement.) In game terms, any and all extra successes the nova may gain via the Seductive and/or Seductive Looks enhancements are effectively doubled for seduction rolls (not persuasion — the nova's victims will tend to hear only what they want to from the nova). The downside of this is that the bonus is applied to ANY action of the nova's that could be seen as seductive by his/her victims (Storyteller's decision). Also, the Storyteller will kindly make all Seduction rolls for the nova's player, and doesn't have to inform the player about it beforehand. Novas with this aberration will often have no idea that they've won a victim's affections — until the victim makes some moves of her/his own...

- **Laughable:** There's simply something about a nova with this aberration — namely, something that makes him seem utterly ridiculous to baseline humans (and most other novas as well). Perhaps it's the fact that the nova resembles a humanoid French poodle, complete with puffy pink fur. Perhaps the nova looks like something Monty Python would've created for a superhero skit. Perhaps the nova simply looks like he should have “ludicrous dingbat” tattooed on his forehead. In any case, the nova's appearance gives rise to feelings of scorn, derision, and disrespect among baselines. As a result, most baselines will feel inclined to mock the nova or dismiss him out of hand. Even more insightful baselines will have serious trouble taking a Laughable nova seriously without hard evidence to the contrary — they must win a contested Willpower roll against the Laughable nova's Mega-Appearance in order to see the nova as anything other than a quantum-powered buffoon. A Laughable nova will be considered both harmless and unworthy of respect by most baselines and novas alike — he won't be seen as being worth the time to deal with. It should be noted that novas with the Mental Mega-Attributes are not likely to suffer from that misperception, however. As an added burden, a Laughable nova automatically loses 1 success per dot of permanent Taint possessed on all rolls for Intimidation, Command, Interrogation, and otherwise persuading or inspiring other people. Laughable novas also cannot possess the Awe-Inspiring, Commanding Presence, or Dreadful Mien enhancements. Laughable novas can still be seen as being sexy; albeit in a ditz, bimbo-ish manner.

- **Object of Desire*:** Something about the nova makes people want to possess him or her. Upon first meeting the nova, people attracted to him or her must make a resisted Willpower roll vs. the nova's Mega-Appearance. The victim also suffers a penalty on the Willpower roll equal to the nova's Taint-derived penalty on rolls for social interactions with baselines. Failing the roll means that the victim will see the nova as a commodity or treasure to be owned instead of as a person with his or her own

desires and needs. (Just think of how certain rich folk manage to acquire their “trophy spouses”, and how those spouses are treated after they’ve been landed.) The form that the ownership takes will vary with individual victims – some might settle for signing the nova to a contract or hauling off the nova to a wedding chapel, while others may take the idea of owning the nova all too literally... The nova’s victims will be very possessive of him or her, and they will go to great lengths in order to either establish or retain their control over the nova.

- **Piecemeal Metamorphosis:** A nova with this aberration is ever-so-slowly changing into something other than human, one portion of his body at a time. When this aberration first manifests, a small portion of the nova’s anatomy (such as the lower face or hands) will change into whatever the Storyteller decides would be appropriate. As the nova accumulates permanent Taint, exponentially-larger parts of the nova’s body will be altered in this fashion. A common theme for this aberration is gradual transformation into a humanoid animal – for instance, the lower face of the elite known as Dog (from **Aberrant Worldwide: Phase II**) has changed into that of a humanoid schnauzer. Other themes include changing into a humanoid plant or some form of living machine, inorganic matter or energy. (The latter three themes are very appropriate for novas with the Bodymorph power – once the gradual transformation of the nova’s body is complete, this aberration effectively becomes identical to Permanent Power-Bodymorph.) Note that only a defined portion of the nova’s body is affected by this – aside from his lower face, Dog’s body is fairly normal for a male nova at this point in his accumulation of Taint (6 points, F.Y.I.). If Dog reaches 7 Taint, his head will certainly become entirely that of a humanoid schnauzer, and he may develop a full-body coat of fur as well. Depending on what kind of nonhuman morphology the nova is developing, the nova may face certain physical difficulties as well as the inevitable social difficulties. For example: A nova who’s turning into a snake-man might find his legs turning into a single serpentine trunk and tail, while an amphibious female nova might turn into a classical mermaid. A male nova whose head has permanently turned into living thermonuclear plasma won’t be able to wear a hat, nor will he be likely to get any kisses from baseline ladies. A nova whose limbs have turned into living bionics is likely to have trouble with metal detectors and security officers. And let’s not forget the tailoring problems faced by a nova who’s changing into a 173-cm tall humanoid flying squirrel! (Those darn patagia make wearing a tuxedo impossible, and most tailors don’t do tail-flaps.)

- **Shifting Features*:** A nova with this aberration has partially lost control over the appearance of his body. The nova suffers from a shifting in his body weight, mass, and tissue colorations that is virtually unnoticeable from minute to minute, but can radically alter his features over the course of a few hours. While the changes are gradual, they are constant – the nova will look different enough within 24 hours to make him unrecognizable as the same person on the basis of visual recognition. This unsettles baselines (and many novas), resulting in the nova suffering an additional +2 difficulty penalty on all Social rolls beyond making a first impression.

High-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with eight or more points of permanent Taint.

- **Addictive Visage:** While all Mega-Beautiful and Mega-Handsome novas are capable of inspiring adoration and lust in other people, some of those novas take the idea of being attractive to others a bit too far. The undisguised physical appearance of a nova with this aberration is psychologically addictive to baselines that are sexually oriented towards members of the nova’s gender. In game terms, treat the nova’s visage as a drug with an Addiction Rating equal to the nova’s permanent Taint score when the nova is viewed by baselines of the correct sexual orientation. When watching a nova with this aberration, affected baselines will feel intense euphoria and feelings of romantic love along with a loss of inhibitions – consider their effective Wits and Intelligence scores to be lowered by [the nova’s permanent Taint -5] dots, down to a minimum of 1. Additionally, all Willpower rolls to resist sexual overtures from the nova (real or imagined) suffer a difficulty penalty equal to the nova’s permanent Taint. If the nova is being viewed via recordings, the Addiction Rating of his or her visage is lowered by 4 points, unless the nova has the Almost Live enhancement. Addicted baselines will gain the 2-point version of the Addiction Flaw (on pg. 71 of the **Aberrant Player’s Guide**). The effects of this aberration will last for [the nova’s permanent Taint -5] hours. “Detoxing” from the effects of this aberration takes the same length of time, and will leave affected baselines with both a +1 difficulty penalty on all perception rolls to detect pleasurable sensations and a +2 difficulty penalty on all Willpower rolls until their neurochemistry returns to normal. Addicted baselines with Willpower scores of 4 or less may also develop delusions of having a romantic relationship with the nova – these unfortunates often become stalkers. The only way for the nova to control this for any length of time is to use the Mr. Nobody enhancement, provided that his or her Mega-Appearance is high enough to “cover up” this aberration. It should also be noted that a nova with this aberration is likely to be regarded with jealousy from baselines of the same sexual orientation – these folks will see the nova as a sexual rival, resulting in the nova suffering an additional +1 difficulty penalty for social interactions with those people.

- **Doppelgänger Syndrome:** Shapeshifting novas who develop this aberration actually suffer from both a highly specific form of dissociative amnesia (namely, forgetting one’s original appearance) and a compulsive disorder (focused on impersonating other people). Having lost all idea of what she is supposed to look like, the nova will seek to shore up her sense of self by assuming the identity of another person, usually a baseline or nova whose powers the Doppelgänger nova can simulate. If the Doppelgänger nova has the Yin-Yang Mega-Appearance enhancement, she may even forget her original gender! Whenever the nova has an opportunity to assume someone else’s identity, she must roll Willpower (with a penalty equal to her permanent Taint) to avoid impersonating that person. Furthermore, if the nova is somehow prevented from impersonating anyone for 24 hours, the nova will suffer a +1 difficulty penalty on all of her rolls until she can indulge her compulsion. The nova will suffer a cumulative +1 penalty for each

24 hour-period of deprivation past the first. A Doppelgänger nova will seek to maintain her assumed role for as long as possible, although whether she will resort to violence in order to do so is up to her personal sense of ethics. It should be noted that since many shapeshifting novas already work as infiltration agents, they can be quite casual about making someone “disappear” and taking her place... If her impersonation is exposed, the Doppelgänger nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to her permanent Taint) to avoid fleeing the scene in a panic — if hindered, she will lash out violently against any who try to restrain her.

The Flipside of Mega-Appearance: Mega-Ugliness

With the release of the **Adventure!** core book, a major change was introduced in the way that the Social attribute of Appearance functioned. Instead of acting as a measure of a character's physical beauty, Appearance now reflected how memorable the character's looks were to other people. Now, players and Storytellers had the option of creating characters who could be anything from somewhat homely to downright ugly, instead of being just another pretty face in the crowd.

As it was released prior to **Adventure!**, the **Aberrant** core book still used the previous version of the Appearance attribute, but offered the possibility of creating a Mega-Ugly nova instead of your more common Mega-Attractive nova. The Attribute/Mega-Attribute system mechanics had to be tinkered with somewhat, but it worked well enough for the few who wanted to play a Mega-Ugly nova. Unfortunately, space constrictions prevented the writers of **Aberrant** from going into Mega-Ugliness in the level of detail it deserved. With all this in mind, we now offer revised variants of both Appearance and Mega-Appearance that are oriented towards describing physically unattractive characters in the **Aberrant** setting.

Appearance (Ugliness variant)

The Ugliness variant of the Appearance attribute is a combination of physical unattractiveness and innate offensiveness. Whether due to having been horribly disfigured in an accident or beaten with the ugly stick, this variant Attribute measures your character's ability to make a negative first impression or to generate an instinctive response in others.

Qualities: Charred, Nauseating, Nightmarish, Perversely Fascinating, Putrefied, Scabrous, Skanky.

- Poor: You're vaguely unappealing, but otherwise unremarkable. People forget your face easily.
- Average: You're quite homely, yet still within the lower range of what's considered “normal”.
- Good: You turn stomachs when you enter a room.

- Exceptional: You could work in a carnival sideshow — or you might've escaped from one.
- Superb: You're simply unforgettable, much to the dismay of those who catch sight of you.

Mega-Ugliness

Similar to the more socially acceptable version of Mega-Appearance, Mega-Ugliness represents a nova whose looks are more shockingly hideous than the most deformed and repellent baselines who have ever lived. Such a nova will never be able to pass for human (barring use of the Mr. Nobody enhancement), and those baselines not panicked by the Mega-Ugly nova's appearance will still be sickened and disgusted by his looks. And just as baseline society adores Mega-Attractive novas, they revile the much rarer Mega-Ugly novas. These novas are depicted in the media as antisocial and cruel monsters whose minds are as twisted by the effects of Taint as their bodies — and nine times out of ten, they are absolutely correct. The few exceptions to this typically don't get much favorable media exposure, so the preconception endures.

Mega-Ugliness is dependent on the Ugliness version of Appearance in exactly the same way that the other Mega-Attributes depend on their respective base Attributes.

Mega-Ugly characters receive bonus dice for their Intimidation rolls instead of Style — being superhumanly hideous is great when you want to frighten other people, but it can't help make a horrid outfit look good.

- Stupendous: Compared to you, Quasimodo looks like your average working Joe Sixpack. You receive one extra die for all Intimidation rolls (in addition to your Mega-Appearance dice).
- Amazing: Babies and small children scream when they see you, and their parents tend to cringe. You receive two extra dice for all Intimidation rolls.
- Incredible: You creep the hell out of just about everyone you encounter, nova and baseline alike. You receive three extra dice for all Intimidation rolls.
- Spectacular: Simply getting a good look at you is enough to give the average baseline shrieking nightmares for a week at least. You receive four extra dice for all Intimidation rolls.
- Godlike: “Get that [CENSORED] thing AWAY from me!” You receive five extra dice for all Intimidation rolls.

Note: Mega-Ugliness at ratings of 6 dots and higher provides equivalent bonuses to those of standard Mega-Appearance at the same rating. Check with your Storyteller for details of how high-level Mega-Attributes other than Mega-Strength and Mega-Stamina work in your game. The effects of Mega-Strength and Mega-Stamina at ratings of 6+ are detailed in the **Aberrant Player's Guide**, pp. 101-103.

Mega-Ugliness: Squids

It's an unfortunate fact of life — humans tend to judge each other by their appearance when other data is lacking. If a person is ugly, other people usually think that he's also mentally deficient and has a rotten personality to boot. Given that a Mega-Ugly nova is by definition more hideous and repellent than any baseline who has ever lived, one can easily see why many baselines automatically assume that Mega-Ugly novas are just as monstrous in mind and soul as they appear to be in body. And given that unearned mistreatment and degradation is often all that baseline society will offer Mega-Ugly novas, it's equally easy to see why so many of them end up becoming just as hostile and sociopathic as baselines fear them to be.

Mega-Ugliness and Lookism

To understand why Mega-Ugly novas end up receiving this sort of treatment from most baselines; we have to examine “lookism” (also known as beauty prejudice), how it functions, and why humans have it at all. Unlike most other prejudices, lookism is an evolved survival mechanism for life in cultures with little or no technology. It works as an amoral pragmatism and functions on an unconscious level. Even human infants are influenced by lookism, as it's “hardwired” into our brains. Most people are totally unaware of being influenced by lookism — since it's an innate brain function, most would consider it a fundamental part of “being human”. This “lookism circuitry” allows us to distinguish between beauty and ugliness, and rewards us with a feeling of pleasure when we look at beautiful things. Ugly things, of course, inspire distaste. (Even ugly people are repelled by ugliness — both their own and that of others.) It also establishes that humans possess hardwired criteria for both obvious beauty and obvious ugliness, above and beyond cultural and subjective notions of what is and isn't attractive.

(Note: Like any other instinctual response, the effects of lookism can be recognized and moderated by a person who's willing to learn to control himself.)

The obvious application was for deciding what to eat and drink (fresh fruit instead of overripe fruit, freshly-caught trout instead of a rotten turtle carcass, clear water from the river instead of green water from a stagnant pond, etc.), so that primitive humans could tell what was good to eat without having to risk their stomachs (and their lives) every time they came across something new. Those who didn't develop lookism tended to die more often, usually from eating something they shouldn't have.

Lookism was also beneficial in that it let primitive humans judge each other's viability and health as well. Ugly infants were less likely to survive in savage surroundings — cute babies advertised their health and viability, and were deemed to be more worthwhile investments by primitive mothers. Ugly children are still more likely to suffer parental abuse and/or neglect — since they're less likely to live anyway, why would a Stone-Age parent waste energy treating them well? Ugliness in teens and adults signified reduced chances of survival — they were in poorer health and had a lesser chance of siring or bearing successful young. Signs of old age were also considered ugly, as was body asymmetry and other deformities. And again,

those primitive humans without the lookism adaptation were less likely to survive.

Since humans have only been civilized for a little over five thousand years, the lookism adaptation still has strong influence over the human brain. Beauty is as popular as ever (although the bar's gone up quite a bit just in the last century), and ugliness is no more desirable. Most people don't differentiate between quality of physical appearance and personal worth — if beauty equals goodness, then ugliness must equal evil. This idea is patently false, but most still accept this myth as being correct, and have done so for centuries. In the 21st Century of **Aberrant**-era Earth, even the coming of the novas hasn't changed this one whit. Aside from the aforementioned social difficulties faced by ugly people, new ones have arisen. Ugly people must excel in their qualifications in order to compete with better-looking people when applying for a job. Ugly people are less likely to be hired, have lower salaries, and are less likely to be promoted than attractive people who otherwise have equivalent capabilities and qualifications. Ugly people are often used as figures of fun, especially in the media. People like to laugh at ugly people when they know they won't get caught and seem insensitive. Just as television did in the 20th Century, OpNet programs and other forms of media give people an opportunity to enjoy their superficiality without worry of hurting people's feelings. Declaring someone to be ugly has historically been (and still is) cause for hostility, if not outright violence. Even if the insulted person doesn't become hostile, he often becomes depressed and/or suffers the malicious mockery of his peers. It all adds up to being treated as a second-class citizen just because one happens to be ugly.

So how does this affect Mega-Ugly novas? Well, both forms of Mega-Appearance use the lookism inherent in all humans (baselines, novas, etc.) in order to function — Mega-Attractiveness induces an overwhelmingly positive response, while Mega-Ugliness inspires an overwhelmingly negative response. Mega-Ugly novas suffer from all of the problems that ugly baselines face, only multiplied many times over. They have an extremely difficult time trying to make friends, and usually find that winning the affections of possible lovers and spouses is nearly impossible! Both baselines and better-looking novas will tend to write off a Mega-Ugly nova as an evil monster or Taint-prone liability, respectively. A Mega-Ugly nova can also forget about getting a decent-paying job from anyone other than certain Elite agencies like DeVries (where he'll likely end up doing isolated work such as undersea mining) or the organized crime groups like the Camparelli-Zhukov Megasyndicate. After all, they're not complaining about having ScarCrow on their payroll, are they? And then there are the little things that can make life amongst baselines bitter indeed for the Mega-Ugly nova. Being greeted with silence and averted eyes when going to the grocery store or supermarket. Avoiding the neighborhood kids, lest they decide to throw rocks and less-pleasant things at you, heedless of your anger. Receiving regular and unjustified visits from local law enforcement officers, who're just waiting for an excuse to put you in jail and make themselves look good. Being condemned as a demon by the head priest of a local church and his rabid parishioners; or merely being asked to leave when you wish to attend services at a house of worship. Your

neighbors either begin looking to move out of the neighborhood at first opportunity, or begin seeking a way to use the local laws to evict you from your own home. Even your family might disown you, or simply stop speaking of you to their friends. And eventually, the Teragen's recruitment offers begin looking more and more attractive...

Finally, there's one last wicked little wrinkle in this situation. Except for those novas who develop the "Eye of the Beholder" aberration (see **Aberrant: Brainwaves** for details), Mega-Ugly novas still retain the same "lookism circuitry" as do baselines and other novas. Therefore, Mega-Ugly novas will find each other to be just as unappealing as baselines and other novas find them! Mega-Ugly novas are understandably a good deal more tolerant of Mega-Ugliness in general, however. There's nothing quite like shared misery to promote mutual understanding in a social group.

Beauty and the Beast

Unless a Mega-Ugly nova has the "Sexless" aberration (see pg. 93 of the **Aberrant Player's Guide**), he or she will possess a sex drive that's just as powerful as that of any other nova. A few very fortunate Mega-Ugly novas (who will have only 1-2 dots of Mega-Ugliness) might somehow manage to win the love of a perceptive and wise person of the correct gender, but this goal will be extremely hard to attain. Most Mega-Ugly novas are doomed to failure in romantic endeavors before they even start, which does not make for an optimistic outlook on life.

Ugly Ducklings

Most latent novas who don't like their looks for some reason (due to either being ugly or simply a wholly unremarkable "face in the crowd") tend to become Mega-Attractive upon erupting – as they justifiably feel that their poor appearance is an undeserved burden, that problem is almost certain to be corrected in the eruption process. Latent novas who suffer from Imagined Ugliness Disorder (a specific form of delusion) are the exception to this rule of thumb – the eruption process reshapes their bodies to be in line with their delusional self-image. They also tend to develop a greater amount of permanent Taint upon eruption than other novas – given that they're already mentally disturbed prior to erupting as a nova, it makes them that much more likely to develop permanent Taint and aberrations.

Roleplaying Mega-Ugliness

All right, we've touched on the major issues that a Mega-Ugly nova will be facing on a daily basis, and have looked at the root causes of some of them. So how does one translate all that into roleplaying?

Let's perform a little thought experiment. First, estimate the amount of scorn and discrimination that a fairly ugly specimen of baseline humanity can expect to receive from his better-looking peers. (There's a just-about-even chance that anyone reading this will have known at least one person who's had this particular burden.) Second, think about what effect that mistreatment could have on that unlucky person. How would he deal with the frustration of having 99% of his attempts at social interaction and romantic endeavors being doomed to fail before he even started? Would he become bitter and resentful towards better-looking people? Would he be tired of having other people mock him and express revulsion for his appearance? Would he

be sick of enduring the ostracism and discrimination of his better-looking peers? Just how much more of all this could he take before he reaches his limit and decides to retaliate – violently, perhaps – against the people who have caused him so much pain? Now take all that mistreatment and multiply it many times. You now have a rough idea of what a Mega-Ugly nova gets to look forward to whenever he has to interact with baseline society, and often with the better-looking novas as well.

The kicker to all this is that Mega-Ugly novas are just that: phenomenally ugly superhumans. An ugly baseline often has no way to fight against the discrimination he must suffer on a daily basis. That's not the case with Mega-Ugly novas – given the dazzling array of quantum powers and other Mega-Attributes he might possess, a Mega-Ugly nova can lash out against his tormentors in ways that they simply cannot protect themselves from. And once a Mega-Ugly nova begins lashing out at those baselines who've mistreated him, it's a short step from there to lashing out against baseline society in general. That nova also becomes a likely recruit for the Teragen. At least from a baseline viewpoint, it's a recipe for disaster...

The New Pariahs

While all novas are the ultimate outsiders, Mega-Ugly novas go beyond the pale – they are the ultimate outcasts. While other novas might still be able to entertain the hope of fitting in, Mega-Ugly novas have no such illusions. Historically, baseline humanity has always been unkind to those it deems to be defective. Infants born with deformities were either killed at birth or left to die at the fangs and claws of whatever wild predators happen to be around at the time. Amniocentesis and genetic screening perform the same task today, for those who can afford it. The poor face the risk of having a "special child", which is typically understood to mean "useless burden and financial drain." People who suffer from crippling injuries or diseases are also demoted to monsterhood, unless they're rich – and even then, they're condescended to by "normal" people. Humans with mental disorders make up the third strata of the monster class. And they all give most "normal" humans the creeps. Upstanding "normal" people don't want any monsters around, so they get rid of them somehow – and death has always been a popular solution to this problem. In modern times these unfortunates are usually banished from society into some form of incarceration (also known as nursing homes, mental hospitals, rehab facilities, etc.). Some are also given work at a "sheltered workshop" (where they toil at an often hazardous and always degrading assembly or disassembly line for pennies a day as slave labor for the benefit of a "normal" businessman). As for those who manage to remain free? They get to deal with "normal" people; many of whom stare rudely, assume patronizing attitudes, and offer to "help" them (usually into one of the aforementioned incarceration facilities for monsters, where they can be safely forgotten about).

As one would expect, "normal" baselines see Mega-Ugly novas as just another kind of monster, but with one vital difference: these monsters can and will fight back. They can't be locked away like a deformed, disabled, or mentally disturbed baseline. Try to exploit them, and you could very well end up dead – if you're lucky. This makes Mega-Ugly novas a clear

threat in the eyes of most “normal” baselines, but there's also an element of bigotry mixed in with the fear. “How dare these monsters show their hideous faces in our nice, normal community?! How dare they pollute our happy, normal lives with their presence?! How dare they protest the manner in which we treat them?! How dare they reject our attempts to help them and make them normal?! How dare they act as if they were human beings/real citizens/worthwhile people like us normal folks?! How dare these subhuman creatures forget their ordained place in our society?!”

The bottom line is this: for most Mega-Ugly novas, there is simply no way to live in baseline society without suffering massive prejudice, discrimination, and degradation. It's not a question of *if* they will eventually lash out against baseline society — it's a question of *when*. Conflict is assured.

Mega-Ugliness and Taint

So how do Mega-Ugliness and Taint interact, as far as the game mechanics go? Do you have to have Taint in order to be Mega-Ugly? Just what makes Anathema an enhancement while Unstable is an aberration? How does a nova with the “Eye of the Beholder” aberration see a Mega-Ugly nova (or a Mega-Attractive nova)? Is Mega-Ugliness a “get out of jail free” card for the problems of Taint accumulation?

These are the main questions that a Storyteller is likely to hear from her players regarding Mega-Ugliness. In the interest of keeping rules lawyers and incessant questions from slowing down one's gaming sessions, we've taken a moment to kindly answer them for you.

- **Question 1:** How does Mega-Ugliness and Taint interact?

Answer: Just like any other Mega-Attribute interacts with Taint — you can buy a dot of Mega-Ugliness at half-price by buying it Tainted, which will eventually lead to gaining aberrations derived from that Tainted dot of Mega-Ugliness.

- **Question 2:** Do you have to have Taint in order to be Mega-Ugly?

Answer: No, but it certainly helps! While most people would leap at the chance to become Mega-Attractive if it were honestly offered to them, there will always be someone that's an exception. A Taint-free Mega-Ugly nova is possible if one goes strictly by the rules (and such a person would likely have an extremely unpleasant — if wholly rational — personality to begin with), but the majority of Mega-Ugly novas will have accumulated at least four or five points of permanent Taint. As the power (and Taint) levels of the novas in your **Aberrant** campaign increase over time, both types will become scarier — the Tainted ones will lose themselves to Taint, while the (by comparison) non-Tainted Mega-Ugly nova becomes more powerful.

- **Question 3:** What's the difference between a Mega-Ugliness enhancement and a Mega-Ugliness aberration?

Answer: The same difference between any enhancement and aberration — the first is a superhuman advantage, while the second is a handicap of varying degree. While certainly unpleasant, the Mega-Ugliness enhancements provide distinct advantages to the Mega-Ugly nova who has them. All that Mega-Ugliness aberrations provide is a disadvantage, albeit one that can act as a handy character hook and can make the nova's appearance fairly distinctive.

- **Question 4:** How does a nova with the “Eye of the Beholder” aberration (see **Aberrant: Brainwaves** for details) see a Mega-Ugly nova (or a Mega-Attractive nova)?

Answer: Basically, the effects of both types of Mega-Appearance are reversed in the case of a nova with the “Eye of the Beholder” aberration — Mega-Ugliness will be seen as Mega-Attractiveness, and Mega-Attractiveness will be seen as Mega-Ugliness. In the case of certain Mega-Appearance enhancements, simply apply the alternate version: Anathema for Awe-Inspiring, Bête Noire for First Impression, Gruesome for Rapture, and Minotaur Syndrome for Friendly Face. The Storyteller has the final say on the exact details in your chronicle, as always.

Note: There's some excellent potential for twisted comedy here, folks. Just imagine what could happen when a Mega-Ugly nova with “Eye of the Beholder” sees another Mega-Ugly nova who lacks that aberration — and falls in love! Or how about when that Mega-Ugly nova with “Eye of the Beholder” catches sight of a Mega-Attractive teenaged nova girl — and runs away screaming in fright!

- **Question 5:** Is Mega-Ugliness a “get out of jail free” card for the problems of Taint accumulation?

Answer: No, of course not! A player cannot use Mega-Ugliness as a means to avoid the effects of Taint accumulation. Mega-Ugly novas are vulnerable to all the problems of both temporary and permanent Taint, just like the other novas. A Mega-Ugly nova can develop aberrations and will suffer the same difficulty penalties on interactions with baselines and less-Tainted novas, provided that he racks up enough permanent Taint. Refer to the **Aberrant** core book (pp. 148-153) for the sordid details.

Mega-Ugliness and Enhancements

• **Banned Enhancements:** As Mega-Ugliness is a measurement of how repellent and frightening the nova's appearance is to other people, it's only reasonable for the Storyteller to forbid Mega-Ugly novas from having any Mega-Appearance enhancements that are dependent on personal beauty and sex appeal. This is balanced out by the existence of Mega-Appearance enhancements available only to Mega-Ugly novas. Several Mega-Appearance enhancements that should be banned to Mega-Ugly novas are listed below.

Aberrant core book: Awe-Inspiring, First Impression, Seductive Looks.

Aberrant Compendium: Friendly Face, Natural Style, Objet d'Art, Rapture, Splendor.

• **Altered Enhancements:** Three Mega-Appearance enhancements from the *Aberrant Compendium* can be used with Mega-Ugliness, albeit with skewed effects. They are listed below.

Ageless: While this enhancement still makes it extremely difficult to estimate the Mega-Ugly nova's physical age, it will inspire revulsion instead of attraction. The Mega-Ugly nova will always be seen as being “horribly wrong” instead of “just right”, limiting the usefulness of this enhancement.

Timeless: This enhancement allows the Mega-Ugly nova to ignore all Appearance-based penalties derived from superficial, cultural, and temporal notions of what is considered frightening and repellent.

Universal Appeal: This enhancement lets the Mega-Ugly nova retain his horrifying looks no matter what form he assumes via the Shapeshift power, which can be helpful on missions to spread terror.

Storyteller Note: The Mirroring enhancement for Mega-Appearance (from the **Aberrant Player's Guide**, on pp. 105-106) can be problematic when deciding whether or not it should be available to Mega-Ugly novae. We have therefore left answering that question to the Storyteller's discretion.

New Mega-Ugliness Enhancements

Additional enhancements that characters with Mega-Ugliness may learn or purchase include:

Anathema

Ever since language was invented, human tale-spinners have told stories about monsters whose mere presence was horrific enough to make even the fiercest warriors quake in fear. A Mega-Ugly nova with this enhancement is the living embodiment of that tradition, as the sheer malevolence of his visage is simply too much for ordinary people to deal with. And even in the 21st Century, people can still feel the caveman's instinctive fear of the terrors that lurk in the darkness, just beyond the edge of the campfire's light...

A Mega-Ugly nova with this enhancement inspires dread, horror, and feelings of helplessness in those around him. As with Awe-Inspiring, normal humans often have trouble dealing with an Anathematic nova in a straightforward manner. Weak-willed people will seek to flee his presence at the first opportunity, and even those folks with stronger wills tend to feel intimidated, inadequate, and cowed. If an Anathematic nova walks through a crowded public area – like a shopping mall, perhaps – you can bet that everyone else there will either flee the vicinity or do their best to hide and evade the Anathematic nova's notice.

System: This enhancement works only when the people are in the nova's presence and looking at him. Mega-Ugly novae with Anathema receive 1 automatic success per dot of Mega-Ugliness on rolls for Intimidation and Interrogation (in addition to the standard Mega-Attribute bonuses for Mega-Ugliness). Anathematic novae should also receive that same bonus to any roll related to evoking despair and feelings of helplessness in other people. Finally, those Inspired beings an Anathematic nova faces in combat must make a Willpower roll at standard difficulties – if they acquire enough successes to match or exceed the Anathematic nova's Mega-Ugliness rating, they can fight normally. Those who fail will have their Initiative ratings reduced by 1 point per dot of Mega-Ugliness possessed by the Anathematic nova. Baselines and other non-Inspired beings will automatically have their Initiative ratings reduced – don't even bother rolling.

Unlike Awe-Inspiring, Anathema isn't negatively affected by Taint – it practically depends on it!

This enhancement costs 1 quantum point to activate and lasts for a scene. Even when it isn't actively “on”, the

Anathematic nova is still extremely horrifying, and the Storyteller should keep this in mind. (People will automatically assume that the nova is a monster, animals will be frightened by him, and so on.)

Bête Noire

Mega-Ugly novae with this enhancement excel at making first impressions of a highly unpleasant nature. Rather than appealing to the subject's desires, they evoke the subject's fears instead. Whatever the other person dreads, he will find it in a Mega-Ugly nova with this enhancement.

System: When meeting someone for the first time (or after a long time apart), the Mega-Ugly nova may spend 1 quantum point to activate this enhancement and automatically make the most threatening first impression possible on that person. The Mega-Ugly nova may deliberately say or do something to negate this effect, but an accidental faux pas won't be enough. The bad impression will remain with the other person until the Mega-Ugly nova does something to disprove it, either in person or via media reports – it's hard to pass oneself off as Evil Incarnate if the media catches you selflessly coming to the rescue of innocent baselines. Other people may also negate the effects of this enhancement by convincing the target that he or she was wrong about the Mega-Ugly nova. Use of this enhancement has been known to backfire, however – in some cases it can amount to putting a bull's-eye on one's chest and daring the subject to take a shot.

This enhancement also makes the Mega-Ugly nova seem to be whatever the subject deems to be most frightening and dangerous to him or her. Clever novae with the Telepathy power use this enhancement to discover that information, in order to use it and validate the subject's fears. If the target is involved in criminal activities, she'll think that the Mega-Ugly nova has both the goods on her and the willingness to use that information against her. In social situations, this will make the Mega-Ugly nova seem like the absolute last person in the world that the other person would want to either deal or interfere with.

Disquieting

Some things are so appallingly grotesque that people tend to suffer a momentary psychological dysfunction as they attempt to comprehend the sheer repulsion on display before them. Some Mega-Ugly novae have learned to take advantage of this, as it can grant them a few precious seconds when it counts.

System: The Mega-Ugly nova's horrendous looks are enough to give most anyone pause. Anyone looking upon the Mega-Ugly nova for the first time must make a Willpower roll or be frozen in shock for one turn. Disquieting novae can use that time to do whatever they please, although attacking a victim of this enhancement is more than enough to jar him out of this temporary dysfunctional state. This has no effect on other Mega-Ugly novae (who are familiar with superhuman ugliness) or most aliens (whose own ideas on beauty and ugliness will likely have no congruence with those of humanity). This enhancement has no quantum point cost and is always in effect, barring use of the Mr. Nobody enhancement.

Gruesome

A Mega-Ugly nova with this enhancement is superhumanly nauseating enough that simply looking at him is enough to cause

severe gastronomical distress to those unlucky enough to behold him. Even hardened people such as slaughterhouse workers, morticians and sewer inspectors are sickened by a Gruesome nova.

System: The nova can make people who can see him feel sufficient disgust to suffer acute nausea with the expenditure of a quantum point. The nova's targets must roll Mega-Stamina at + [the nova's Mega-Ugliness] difficulties to avoid vomiting and/or retching. Treat targets of this enhancement as having been Dazed – (see **Aberrant** core book, pg. 249), save that the Gruesome nova's targets don't suffer bashing damage.

This enhancement affects everyone who can see the nova (line-of-sight), costs 1 quantum point to use, and can only be used once per turn.

Mind-Shattering Horror

Prerequisites: Mega-Ugliness at 6+ dots, and either Face of Terror or Sheer Hideousness.

Ever since the works of H.P. Lovecraft became popular, horror writers have propounded the idea that there are some sights that Man Was Never Meant To See. A Mega-Ugly nova with this enhancement is a perfect example of this Lovecraftian ideal, as the sight of him is enough to cause permanent psychological damage to the minds of lesser men and women. Fortunately, that description doesn't apply to the Inspired...

System: The Mega-Ugly nova spends 1 quantum point and rolls his Mega-Ugliness against the Willpower of any non-Inspired being unlucky enough to see him clearly. (Thick smoke or other visual impediments sufficient to cause a minimum of +2 difficulty penalties to Vision rolls will be enough to prevent this enhancement from functioning.) If the nova scores more net successes on that roll, the victim gains a permanent mental disorder chosen by the Storyteller. This enhancement affects every non-Inspired being who can clearly see the Mega-Ugly nova (line-of-sight), costs 1 quantum point to use, and lasts until the end of the scene.

Minotaur Syndrome

While the superhumanly poor looks of Mega-Ugly novas can provoke fear reactions in baselines, those with this enhancement do so in spades. The face of a Mega-Ugly nova with the Minotaur Syndrome looks vicious enough to terrify people who don't know him personally. The downside to this is that any attempts the Mega-Ugly nova may make to engage in friendly socializing with strangers will be severely hampered.

System: The nova gains + 6 automatic successes on all hostile Social-based rolls involving strangers, who will see the nova as being a vicious, cruel, hateful, and unremittingly hostile brute. While this can help in demoralizing one's foes in combat and other dangerous situations, it's also a major impediment in the nova's social life: the nova automatically loses 3 successes from all non-hostile Social-based rolls involving strangers.

Note to Storytellers: those people who come to know the nova are entirely immune to the effects of this enhancement. This can be helpful for interacting with friends and family, but has its drawbacks if the nova's foes become familiar with him. The benefits and drawbacks of this enhancement are cumulative with other Mega-Social enhancements. This enhancement is permanent, and has no quantum point cost.

Nightmarish

This enhancement lets the horror of a Mega-Ugly nova's frightful appearance seep into the dreams of his victims. Anyone unfortunate enough to be looking at the Mega-Ugly nova when this enhancement is used will suffer from extremely intense nightmares whenever they fall asleep. The anxiety and fear produced by these nightmares is sufficient to render sleeping a complete waste of time, as the victims will toss and turn the entire night without any respite.

System: The nova spends 1 quantum point and pits his Appearance in a resisted roll against the Willpower of anyone who happens to be looking at him. For every net success gained by the Mega-Ugly nova, a victim will be unable to receive any of the benefits of sleeping for one full day. As these benefits include quantum point recovery, Willpower recovery, wound recovery, and so on, this can become very inconvenient. A victim who suffers for 5 consecutive nights of this deprivation must make a Willpower roll on each night after the fifth. Failure means the victim gains a temporary mental disorder until he or she has a period of normal, restful sleep. A botch means the victim gains a permanent mental disorder. Since this roll is made while a victim is asleep, the Storyteller may choose to disallow spending Willpower on the roll.

This enhancement works a little differently in the case of novas with Mega-Stamina. Mega-Stamina won't get rid of the nightmares or lessen the effects of this enhancement, but it does allow a nova to go without sleep for longer periods of time than a baseline without suffering any adverse effects. When the effects of this enhancement are strong enough to affect such a nova for 5 consecutive nights, each dot of Mega-Stamina will allow a nova to delay each Willpower roll by one additional day. (A nova with Mega-Stamina 3 would have to make his first Willpower roll on the eighth night, with the next taking place on the eleventh.) Novas with Adaptability may only be affected by this enhancement if they choose to sleep; if they choose not to sleep then the effects of this enhancement are negated.

Revolting

For most people, simply having to look at a Mega-Ugly nova is a highly unpleasant experience. Some Mega-Ugly novas can use their horrible looks to evoke feelings of revulsion in others that are extreme enough that the vast majority of people simply cannot bear to look at them. Understandably, this gives Mega-Ugly novas a definite edge in many dangerous situations.

System: Activating this enhancement costs either 1 quantum point per turn, or 3 quantum points to use this for an entire scene. Anyone who tries to attack the Revolting nova must make a Willpower roll against his Appearance. If they fail the Willpower roll, the subjects will suffer reductions on their attack dice pools if attacking the Revolting nova requires looking directly at him. Hand-to-hand, melee and ranged attacks may still be made against the Revolting nova, but the subjects must subtract his Mega-Ugliness and Appearance dots from their attack dice pools (counting the Revolting nova's Mega-Ugliness dice first). Also, any applicable Mega-Attribute dice are subtracted from the attacker's dice pools first. Alternatively, the Revolting nova's attackers can choose to attack him while blind (using the Blind Fighting general maneuver on pg. 243 of

the **Aberrant** core book), if they are willing to fight with their eyes closed.

Terrorize

As fans of late 20th Century horror movies could tell you, many people have a mental threshold when it comes to dealing with extreme levels of fear. Once that threshold is exceeded, the instinctive fear response of such a frightened person will be dangerously over-stimulated. Someone unlucky enough to be in this state of mind will perceive any person, animal, or animate object he sees as being dangerous and terrifying. It was inevitable that some Mega-Ugly novas would learn how to take advantage of this effect.

System: A Mega-Ugly nova with this enhancement has learned how to over-stimulate the instinctive fear response of other people (and the higher forms of animal life such as mammals, marsupials, and birds) by temporarily altering her victims' neurochemistry. To use this enhancement, the Mega-Ugly nova must first frighten her victim by making an Intimidation roll against the Willpower of up to [the nova's Mega-Ugliness] victims. If the Mega-Ugly nova gains even one success, she may spend 1 quantum point to amplify the fear response she's induced in her victims. For the rest of the scene the Mega-Ugly nova's victims will react to all other people (including alien sapients), animals, or animate objects as if the encountered beings were all employing the "Face of Terror" enhancement. (In game terms, encountered beings will receive 3 automatic successes on Intimidation rolls and other rolls based on fear or disgust made against victims of this enhancement. This bonus includes any power or ability that allows a character to inspire those emotions in others).

Trauma

People have a tendency to remember those unfortunates who are particularly ugly, and this tendency is only becomes more pronounced in the case of Mega-Ugly novas. Those Mega-Ugly novas with this enhancement have learned to use that tendency to their advantage, as the effects of their Mega-Ugliness can haunt the minds of those people unlucky enough to witness such horrors up close and personal.

System: Once the Mega-Ugly nova has successfully affected up to [the nova's Mega-Ugliness] victims with another of his Mega-Ugliness enhancements in person, he may then spend 1 quantum point and roll his Mega-Ugliness against his victims' Willpower. If the Mega-Ugly nova wins the roll, the affected victims will suffer the effect of the previously used Mega-Ugliness enhancement for a certain period of time just by being reminded of the Mega-Ugly nova in some way. (Effective reminders would include seeing a picture of the Mega-Ugly nova, hearing the Mega-Ugly nova's name being spoken, reading about the Mega-Ugly nova, etc.) The duration of this enhancement is 1 day per success achieved by the Mega-Ugly nova. The Mega-Ugly nova can extend the duration of this enhancement by spending another quantum point and making at least indirect contact with his victims; a phone call, e-mail message or hand-written note will suffice. Once the victims receive his message, the period of traumatization will be extended by a number of days equal to the Mega-Ugly nova's initial successes in using this enhancement. If the original period

of traumatization expires before the Mega-Ugly nova can extend its duration, he must use this enhancement anew on his victims.

Storyteller Note: Long-term exposure to the effects of this enhancement (typically a few months) may result in a victim suffering long-term psychological damage. Victims who suffer additional traumatic emotional events at the hands of the Mega-Ugly nova (breaking into a victim's home, harming a victim's friends or loved ones, personally harming or degrading a victim, and so on) while under the effect of this enhancement can also suffer long-term psychological damage. In game terms, "long-term psychological damage" typically means gaining a mental disorder of whatever sort that the Storyteller deems appropriate.

Example: Jacob Harrison hasn't been enjoying his life as a nova as much as he thought he would. Thanks to extremely rapid Taint accumulation, the now-reclusive bondage and S/M enthusiast has become the spitting image of a Cenobite from Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* movies in addition to having Mega-Ugliness 3 (with the Anathema and Trauma enhancements). And as if losing what friends and social life he had prior to his eruption wasn't enough; he's about to be audited by the I.R.S., the electrical service to his Detroit house has been cut off and there's a pair of Utopian recruiting agents on his doorstep who simply refuse to go away. Something in Jacob's mind snaps, and he telekinetically opens his front door, letting the Utopians inside his lightless house...

Michelle Schmidt's latest recruitment effort for Project Utopia has just gone horribly wrong. Having just seen her partner torn to bloody shreds by barbed chains that came flying out of nowhere at Jacob's command, all she can do is whimper on the floor in the fetal position as the nova favors her with a smirk before vanishing into the darkness. (Michelle's Willpower of 5 wasn't enough for her to resist the effects of Jacob's Anathema enhancement. Having disposed of her partner, Jacob takes the opportunity to use Trauma on her. He makes the roll, and gets 4 successes.) When Michelle is finally found by a Utopian rescue team, they hustle her into debriefing right away, which goes about as well as could be expected. In addition to now being severely phobic about the dark, for the next four days Michelle automatically curls up in the fetal position and starts whimpering uncontrollably whenever she's reminded of Jacob Harrison. Elsewhere, Jacob Harrison has just appeared inside his regional I.R.S. offices, intent on giving his would-be auditors back some of their own medicine...

Mega-Ugliness Aberrations

Aberrations linked to Mega-Ugliness can be of any type, but are bound by the common theme of grotesquerie. Physical aberrations are the most common, but mental aberrations can develop as a result of the stresses and frustrations that are suffered by Mega-Ugly novas. The following aberrations tend to be found only in novas with at least one dot of Mega-Ugliness.

Common aberrations from **Aberrant** and the **Aberrant Player's Guide** for Mega-Ugly novas include Aberrant Eyes, Bad Temper, Bipolar Disorder, Colored Skin, Delusions, Hardened Skin, Hormonal Imbalance (Lust), Hormonal Imbalance (Rage), Oozing Skin, Sadism, Scales, Sexless, Sheer Hideousness,

Sloughed Flesh, Twisted Limbs, and Vestigial Limbs. Some of the aberrations from the Mega-Appearance section of this book can be used for Mega-Ugly novas as well; namely Aberrant Hair, Chromatic Hair, Distinctive Looks, Piecemeal Metamorphosis, and Strange Scent.

Low-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with four to five points of permanent Taint.

- **Cyclops:** Instead of having two eyes, a nova with this aberration has only one eye, which is situated directly above his nose. Aside from the difficulties of having only one functional eye (+1 difficulty to all ranged attack and dodge rolls, +2 difficulty to Perception rolls); the nova will be unable to use many kinds of eye-protection and vision-enhancing devices.

- **Deformed Cranium:** The shape of the nova's skull becomes altered by Taint. Possible deformities include a Mayan-style bound head, craniosynostosis, or a skull that comes to a point on the top (anyone remember Zippy the Pinhead?). As permanent Taint accumulates, this could lead to a head structure as inhuman and bizarre as that of the aberrant Anders Nash (see **Darkness Revealed 1: Descent Into Darkness**, for **Trinity**).

- **Disease Stigmata:** The Taint of a nova with this aberration cosmetically mimics the disfiguring effects of a specific disease chosen by the Storyteller. Despite appearances (pun intended), the nova suffers no actual effects of the disease beyond the disfigurement. While this aberration can aid the nova in passing himself off as a diseased baseline, he likewise runs the risk of being mistaken for a contagious disease-carrier.

- **Gill Flaps:** The nova has manifested nonfunctional gills on either his cheeks or the sides of his neck. While both versions are incredibly obvious, having large apertures in your cheeks can make dining in polite company a trial at best.

- **Infested:** The nova is covered with some form of parasitic vermin or microlife (algae, fungi, bacterial colonies, etc.) that literally lives off of his body. Aside from making the nova bear a strong resemblance to day-old roadkill, the infesting organisms will cause 1 health level of bashing damage per day due to their constant feeding off of the nova's flesh. If the infesting organisms are flight-capable insects, they might also swarm around the nova, incurring a difficulty penalty on the nova's Stealth rolls equal to his permanent Taint. Infested novas with the Regeneration enhancement can choose to forfeit a quantum point instead of the health level, as they can heal the damage quickly for a price. Infested novas with the Adaptability enhancement will find that it will allow whatever is infesting them to survive right along with them; so the nova can't get rid of the infestation by taking a quick bath in molten lava, for example.

- **Lipless:** The nova's lips have withered away, leaving his teeth and gums constantly exposed. Aside from looking fairly unpleasant, this aberration also results in constant drooling and an impediment of the nova's speech. Unless the nova wears a mask covering his lower face, he can expect people to reflexively shudder in disgust when they first catch sight of him.

- **Neurofibroma:** Benign tumors sprout from the nova's flesh at a chosen location on the nova's skin surface. The tumors may either take the form of spheroid 'bubbles' or 'floppy folds of flesh' — both varieties look awful and can cause difficulties in

using certain equipment. As the nova's permanent Taint accumulates, the tumors will eventually grow to cover most or all of his skin surface. Depending on the particulars of this aberration, this can lead to the nova manifesting other aberrations later on — Oozing Skin if the spheroid tumors begin leaking bodily fluids, Sensory Impairment if the fold tumors grow from the nova's face, and so forth.

- **Spurs:** The nova has sprouted spiny projections of some sort at various body locations — they cannot be used to do any real damage (that requires Body Modification: Spines), but they look highly unpleasant. They can also make wearing non-eufiber clothing difficult at best. Various forms of spurs include bony projections, pseudo-claws, and mesa-like ossified skin tumors.

- **Throat Sac:** A huge fleshy pouch grows on the throat of a nova with this aberration. It usually looks like a large goiter, but can inflate to grotesque proportions when the nova makes a loud vocalization or draws a deep breath. As the nova's Taint progresses, the throat sac will usually acquire a vivid coloration. This aberration is often manifested by novas with tongue-tendrils or voice-based sonic powers.

Medium-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with six to seven points of permanent Taint.

- **Altered Mouth:** The structure of the nova's mouth has been radically altered into something totally inhuman. Possible forms of this aberration include insectoid mandibles or a proboscis, a lamprey-style rasping sucker, a beak like those of birds or cephalopods, vertically-oriented jaws, or something grotesquely complex like the mouth structure of the aliens from the *Predator* movies. Novas with this aberration are not likely to get many kisses on the mouth, and may face dining difficulties.

- **Cephalothorax:** The nova's head & thorax (aka the torso from the diaphragm on up) have fused into a single structure, with the nova having no discernable neck. While this usually results in the nova having an enlarged face and mouth (which is often a fanged maw), this aberration may also indicate a headless state, with the cranial organs located elsewhere in the nova's body.

- **Mega-Filthy:** For one reason or another, the nova is always filthy, no matter what attempts are made to clean him. Whether this manifests as horrendously poor personal hygiene or being continually coated in a quantum-generated layer of some particularly odious substance, this aberration will effectively make the Mega-Filthy nova a pariah in polite company.

- **Myriad Feature:** A nova with this aberration will manifest multiple nonfunctional sensory organs or mouths situated on various places on the nova's body. The extra organs will all be of one type (such as eyes), totally useless, and of uniformly horrid appearance.

- **Psyche Mirror:** A nova with this aberration straddles the chasm between the "Mega-Attractive" and "Mega-Ugliness" versions of Mega-Appearance, as quality of his looks has become dependent on his state of mind. The basic version of this aberration has the nova become Mega-Attractive when acting with benevolent intent, and Mega-Ugly when acting with malevolent intent; which will send a clear signal to other people about what the nova's intent is with a little observation.

Alternatively, the nova could become Mega-Ugly when acting with benevolent intent and Mega-Attractive when acting with malevolent intent. It's difficult to help people when your looks frighten them out of their wits, while doing nasty things while wearing your best face can cause all sorts of public relations problems for other novas in general and Mega-Attractive novas in particular. The Storyteller is encouraged to apply whichever version that will prove to be more frustrating to the player of the nova who develops this aberration. Neither version of this aberration can be controlled by the nova who manifests it in any way whatsoever.

- **Skinless:** Mega-Ugly novas with this aberration have lost their skins entirely, turning them into living displays suitable for anatomy lessons. Aside from the horrifying appearance, a Skinless nova will also permanently lose one Bashing Health Level, as he or she lacks the protection provided by skin.

High-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with eight or more points of permanent Taint.

- **Alien Visage:** The body structure of a nova with this aberration loses any resemblance to that of baseline humanity, becoming a bizarre horror that could have come straight out of H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos. The premier example of a nova with this aberration is the Scaled Goddess (see *Asia Ascendant*), who has become a physical duplicate of one of Lovecraft's race of cone-shaped alien entities. Other examples include several **Trinity**-era aberrants who appear to be crawling masses of tentacles, or giant insectoid horrors.

- **Unstable:** This aberration causes the nova's body to be constantly throbbing, pulsating, and changing shape in an utterly revolting manner. The nova's torso and limbs will also be constantly altered in their length and thickness. Baselines (and most novas) tend to become nauseated by the mere sight of seeing living flesh behaving like some kind of horrid animated gelatin – actually coming into physical contact with an Unstable nova can turn even the strongest of stomachs. As an added burden, an Unstable nova will automatically fail any Stealth roll that is dependent on his being either physically still or silent without the use of appropriate quantum powers – the constant motions and disgusting sounds produced by the Unstable nova's always-shifting flesh won't cease for anything short of his death or the removal of this aberration. The effects of this aberration cannot be controlled by the Unstable nova in any way whatsoever.

Mega-Manipulation: Grifters

While P.T. Barnum once said that “There's a sucker born every minute”, most people still like to think that they're sharp enough to avoid being scammed by an opportunist. The simple truth of the matter is that where the grifters – novas with Mega-Manipulation – are concerned, all baselines (and many novas) are born suckers. Most grifters had once hoped to keep the global populace ignorant about the capabilities of Mega-Manipulative novas, making their work that much easier. When the machinations of German nova Heinrich “the Newsman” Keld were thwarted by the Directive in 2004 (see **Aberrant: The Directive** for details), any chance of continued public ignorance was lost. Making things more interesting is that certain baseline governments and espionage organizations have developed a roughly accurate idea of how deep and far-ranging a grifter's influence can reach, and are taking steps to either minimize or eliminate this new threat. The possibility that those steps might be “too little, too late” keeps many baselines up at night. For better or worse, the failed efforts of British nova Arthur Anningsley and his “Temple of the King” cult (see **Aberrant Worldwide: Phase II** for details) have only served to emphasize this danger. Only time will tell what effects the machinations of the grifters will have on the world, and what the resulting consequences will be.

What Webs They Weave

If Mega-Appearance is the most obvious of the Social Mega-Attributes, then Mega-Manipulation is undoubtedly the most subtle. A grifter can twist the facts and play off of other peoples' motives with disturbing ease. With only a few well-placed words, Mega-Manipulative novas can either make trusted allies question each other or total strangers to begin trusting each other. Deceptions, lies, and scams can be created or exposed with only a single statement. If a grifter wants something to happen or be prevented from happening, all he needs to know is which mark it is whose strings have to be pulled. Then all the grifter has to do is stand back and watch his mark perform as desired. Even a person's opinions and beliefs can be altered to suit the aims of a grifter, whose influence is often hidden under the cover of providing well-reasoned advice and timely information. With the right training, a grifter can operate among criminals with ease, successfully get information out of even the most recalcitrant of suspects, and perform acts of hypnotism that most people simply wouldn't believe to be possible. If he's in the right position to do so, a grifter skilled at acting within diplomatic circles can cause international relations to turn for better or worse, as he desires. Grifters can also be inhumanly adept at both physical and psychological torture, seduce even the most faithful of spouses, and use innuendo and deception to control people as if they were mere puppets.

As could only be expected, grifters are in high demand (provided that their loyalties and reliability have been confirmed) to join the ranks of various espionage, covert operations, and law-enforcement agencies in the wealthier countries of the world. With the exploits of Lucas Barrows (from **Aberrant: The Directive**) held as a shining example of

what a grifter agent can accomplish, more than one grifter has found the offer of a government paycheck and position very appealing. Security providers also make attractive offers to grifters; as the threat of nova thieves, saboteurs, and industrial espionage agents is very real.

Of course, if a grifter either can't or won't pursue a legal occupation, there are other options. Provided that a grifter knows how to operate successfully in the criminal underworld, he can make a fair amount of money as a confidence artist. Another possibility is being a “fixer”, who knows just which palms to grease in order to alter the outcome of a legal, political, or even a sporting contest. And then there's the trade of the blackmail artist, depending on whom the grifter gets his hooks into, he can wind up either very wealthy... or very dead. Other grifters have managed to falsely portray themselves as possessing great spiritual wisdom, and establish themselves as gurus. More than a few of these phony gurus also manage to form nova-cults centered on themselves from their followers. While some nova cults are little more than collections of human pets whose lives revolve around providing pleasure for their grifter “messiah”, others have been formed with even darker purposes in mind... (See Chapter 1 of this book for details on nova cults.)

Despite the common stereotypes of Mega-Manipulative novas, grifters have found plenty of other gainful occupations in which they can employ their superhuman influence over other people. The fact that most of them happen to be perfectly legal as well is simply icing on the cake. As any government or corporation that has faced off against the “Hit Squad” of Project Utopia's Legal Department in court could attest, Mega-Manipulative lawyers have won cases that seemed to be open-and-shut victories for the opposition and have enacted sweeping changes (not all of which are for the better) in the laws of nations around the world. Other grifters have found use for their special talents in the field of merchandising, where their marketing campaigns can help their employers rake in wealth undreamed of from eager consumers – or ruin the businesses of their employers' competition. Salesmanship is another career option that grifters have been known to excel in, although a few consumer advocates in the United States have attempted to legislate against merchandisers' employment of nova salesmen on grounds of unfair business practices. Some grifters turn to politics instead, acting as diplomats, consultants, and advisors when they aren't active politicians themselves. With the spread of the OpNet and the resulting ease of getting the news out to a global audience, several grifters have become journalists. While a few are known to work as news anchors for established media giants such as CNN, Viasoft, and the N! network (all of whom make sure to provide their talking heads with extremely clear instructions on what is or isn't newsworthy), other such grifters spurn those companies as “tools of the Establishment”. Instead they work freelance, often contributing their articles and reports to alternative news organizations such as the Disinformation Group (still going strong as of 2015). A few grifters have put the “hypnotic” facet of Mega-Manipulation to good use in psychological therapy and counseling. These Mega-Manipulative novas spend their days helping patients recover from a wide range of afflictions, as

anything from severe emotional trauma or phobias to trivial problems such as correcting unhealthy habits can show up on the dockets of these grifters.

Questions of Trust

For grifters, the major problem of having Mega-Manipulation is their widespread reputation for deceit and trickery. Ever since the Newsman Incident in 2004, rumors about the dangers posed by Mega-Manipulative novas have been circulating among baselines and other novas alike. Thus, a grifter has two options: either keep one's Mega-Manipulative abilities and schemes safely hidden in the shadows, or openly work to expose other grifters and their schemes to the harsh light of public scrutiny.

One problem with this state of affairs is that those grifters who work as investigators are likely to make serious enemies among the other grifters, and become the targets of smear campaigns to discredit them in the eyes of the public. In the absence of reliable and accurate information on grifters and their plans, baselines will be left to fill in the gaps with speculations and hearsay. This environment makes a perfect breeding ground for feelings of anxiety, hysteria, and paranoia about grifters (and novas in general) among baselines. Nobody enjoys the possibility of being made a patsy, which will likely result in most known grifters being branded as untrustworthy scoundrels. The only exceptions to this would be those few grifters who are perceived as being benevolent and having impeccable personal integrity by the public at large, although even they will encounter suspicion from professional paranoids such as agents of the Directive.

Another problem that a grifter will often face is the strong temptation to take advantage of other people. As most of the people around a grifter are naïve and gullible fools in comparison, playing them like puppets can seem irresistibly easy. While this is most often done to make things more convenient for the grifter, more than one public incident can be traced to a bored grifter who wanted a little live entertainment. This can quickly cause a grifter to lose any respect he once might've had for people who cannot resist his influence. Why should a grifter respect another person's opinions when he can change those opinions however he wants with a statement or two? Why should a grifter care about the feelings of other people when most of them seem to be little more than living meat puppets that will dance at his command? Unfortunately, many grifters don't even make the attempt to resist this temptation.

A related problem is that some grifters can become paranoid about other people's motivations and actions. Nobody, but *nobody* knows just how easy it can be to influence other people better than a grifter. It can be all too easy to begin looking for signs of another grifter's influence in the actions and opinions of anyone a grifter meets. After all, they're already patsies – they just don't know it yet. How are they supposed to know if a grifter's pulling their strings? It only gets worse when another grifter is encountered, as the paranoid grifter will suddenly just *know* that he's just encountered the grifter that's behind all the plots he's been finding lately. Matters tend to go downhill from there.

Mega-Manipulation and Quantum Powers

Mega-Manipulation can also improve a nova's skill at wielding some quantum powers, especially those that involve creating illusions or controlling other beings and machines. These Grifters are able to get more out of powers based on this attribute by applying their Mega-Manipulation dice to the dice pool of the power in question. A listing of applicable quantum powers and techniques from the **Aberrant** core book follows.

Manipulation Powers: Cyberkinesis (Control, Fool), Disorient, Domination, Holo, Mirage, Molecular Manipulation (Animation), Quantum Construct, Temporal Manipulation (Age Alteration).

Grifters and Sphinxes

As mentioned in **Aberrant: Brainwaves**, sphinxes have been known to manipulate people and events on a wide scale. It's entirely possible – perhaps inevitable – that a grifter's petty schemes (in comparison to those of a sphinx) might inadvertently ruin the machinations of a sphinx. It's pretty much the equivalent of tossing a monkey wrench into a piece of complex machinery, and the fact that the grifter might not even know what he's done makes it even harder to protect against. Like other forms of amateur sabotage, a grifter's meddling in the schemes of a sphinx can prove to be far more destructive than the grifter can realize. Then again, there's nothing quite like having an irritated sphinx as one's enemy to make a grifter's life interesting...

Roleplaying Mega-Manipulation

Of all the Social Mega-Attributes, Mega-Manipulation is both the one with the worst reputation (often deserved, but not always) and the one that most easily lends itself to being abused. Faced with this situation, it's not surprising at all that many grifters will do their best to keep themselves from being identified as such. As most grifters tend to have some dots in the other Social Mega-Attributes as well, this usually isn't a problem. This does create a perception in the public's collective mind that a grifter will always have something dirty to hide. Why else, they think, would they be so secretive about being grifters? Instead of “coming out of the closet” as grifters, this public suspicion only serves to make Mega-Manipulative novas even more secretive about their abilities, resulting in a vicious circle of mutual distrust.

When playing a Mega-Manipulative character, there are two things that have to be kept in mind. The first is that in comparison to the grifter, baselines and many novas are both gullible and naïve in the extreme. If she so chooses, a grifter could easily run rampant as she influences the (for the most part) unknowing and helpless people around her. The amount of emotional and psychological damage that such a grifter can inflict is downright horrifying to imagine, and can easily cause feelings of deep hatred for both the grifter and novas in general among the grifter's victims. The second thing to be kept in mind is that a grifter can easily see through and resist the lies, deceptions, and scams that serve to maintain the structure of baseline society. Baseline politicians, religious figures, and business leaders have no hope of hoodwinking a grifter. Aside

from making grifters into natural mavericks and iconoclasts, they can also find themselves in the position of the child who pointed out that the emperor had no clothes. If a grifter chooses, he can ruin political careers, shatter the faith of worshippers, or drive a business into bankruptcy by publicly exposing the deceptions that serve to support those institutions. The baseline power elite have been well aware of this potential threat ever since the Newsman Incident in 2004, and keep a wary eye out for suspected grifters.

When one plays a Mega-Manipulative nova, the themes of power and responsibility aren't just emphasized, they're highlighted and underlined. Mega-Manipulation is like any other tool – whether or not it's good or bad depends entirely upon how it is used. Although it can very easily be abused in terrifying ways; it can also be used to stimulate social progress, expose corruption, and correct injustices. The only real questions are these: What will a grifter do with his power? And what will the consequences of his actions be?

New Mega-Manipulation Enhancements

Additional enhancements that characters with Mega-Manipulation may learn or purchase include:

Bad Influence

People who have fallen under the spell of a sufficiently-manipulative baseline have often been known to act in ways contrary to their normal behavior. Some Mega-Manipulative novas have taken this knack for behavior modification to disturbing new levels. With this enhancement, a grifter can temporarily alter the base aspects of a target's personality to mirror those of the grifter's own. While best known for causing otherwise respectable and ethical people to engage in overt debauchery and/or acts of outright evil, this enhancement can just as easily be used to temporarily reform thoroughly unethical individuals.

System: The nova spends 1 quantum point and makes a resisted Manipulation roll against the target's Willpower. If the nova gains two successes, he can replace the target's Nature with his own for a number of days equal to the nova's Mega-Manipulation rating. The altered Nature functions as if it were the target's original Nature in all respects (including Willpower recovery). Three or more successes may be needed (the exact number is left to the Storyteller's discretion) if the shift between two different is particularly severe (such as turning a Caregiver into a Monster). There is some risk to the nova in this, however. When a strong-willed target (Willpower of 5+) gains Willpower from her new Nature, she may instead make a Willpower roll (with a difficulty penalty equal to the nova's Mega-Manipulation). If the target achieves even one success, her original Nature will automatically reassert itself. It should be noted that while the target will retain all of her memories; her feelings and attitudes towards them can change dramatically, and not always in a manner that the nova who uses this enhancement can predict. After the duration elapses, the target's original Nature reasserts itself. The nova may extend the duration of this enhancement once every 24 hours on a

given target, provided that he spends an additional quantum point.

Note: Targets that spend an extended period of time under the effect of this enhancement (usually several months or years, but sometimes as little as a week in the case of severe Nature shifts) may suffer long-term psychological damage. Targets who commit what they would normally consider heinous acts (murder, torture, rape, etc.) while under the effect of this enhancement can also suffer long-term psychological damage, once their original Natures reassert themselves. In game terms, “long-term psychological damage” typically means gaining a mental disorder of whatever sort that the Storyteller deems appropriate.

Confessor

As humans are intensely social creatures, it can be very difficult for them to keep things to themselves. This is particularly true when the secret a person is attempting to keep is the source of psychological tension, such as emotional trauma or having committed unethical acts. A Mega-Manipulative nova with this enhancement has an instinct for knowing just what buttons she has to push in order to get a chosen person to tell all he knows about whatever is causing his psychological tension.

This enhancement can be employed in two ways. The first way is the more pleasant of the two, and induces a desire for catharsis in the target. It works best on targets who are suffering from emotional trauma and would like to “get it off their chests”. This way requires the nova to show compassion to her target, even if it's only the offer of a cold drink and an understanding ear for his story about whatever's bothering him.

The second way is much less pleasant, and induces very strong feelings of guilt in the target. While it works best on targets with guilty consciences, even the most heartless of wrongdoers can still be overcome by the effects of this enhancement. This way requires the nova to confront the target with evidence of his misdeeds, and to get the point across to her target that Very Bad Things are likely to happen to him if he doesn't come clean. Novas with this enhancement are likely to be found working as either mental therapy providers for the emotionally-traumatized or as high-priced lawyers.

System: The nova must spend 1 quantum point to activate this enhancement. She then pits her Manipulation + Subterfuge in a resisted roll against the target's Willpower. The effects of this enhancement are twofold. First, each success achieved by the nova effectively incapacitates the target for 1 turn, as he's too busy spilling his guts to focus on anything else at the time. Second, the target willingly and truthfully tells the nova (and everyone else within earshot) everything he knows about the matter that the nova has indicated (whatever's bugging the target, the target's crimes, etc.) for as long as the effect lasts. It can even temporarily pacify a target in the throes of hysteria, berserk rage, or a psychotic break. Depending on how this enhancement is used, the target might experience either psychological relief or distress after the effect wears off — it all depends on the circumstances. This enhancement does have a few limitations, though. First off, it can only affect one target at a time. Second, it can only be used on a target who is either in a non-combat situation or believes himself to be helpless against

the nova. Third, the effect of this enhancement is immediately negated if the nova attacks the target.

Evasive

While Mega-Social novas tend to commit social gaffes much less frequently than baselines do, it can still happen on rare occasions. A Mega-Manipulative nova with this enhancement is a master at getting herself out of the various kinds of sticky situations that can result from a faux pas with nothing worse than a slightly bruised ego to show for it. A slightly embarrassed laugh and a self-effacing comment is all such a nova will need to have those around her dismiss even serious errors as both harmless and inconsequential.

System: Whenever the nova finds himself in a problematic social situation, she can spend 1 quantum point to activate this enhancement. The nova then rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge; each success that she achieves will let the nova ignore a “1” from the results of a failed or botched Wits, Manipulation, or Charisma roll. The effect of this enhancement lasts until the nova manages to extricate herself from the problematic social situation in question.

Inquisition

“So, were there other people in the car with you? How many? One? Two? Three? So, there were three.”

“Were any of them related to you? Father? Uncle? Brother? Oh, your brother was there. Were any of the others related to you?...”

A nova with this enhancement is an expert at gauging other people's reactions to questions and finding out as much information as possible. He has a sense of when they are telling the truth, when they are being evasive, and what their limits are. Typically this takes place during a grueling conversation, but it will also work with harsher interrogation methods.

System: The nova spends 1 quantum point per interrogation, and receives 3 automatic successes for any rolls for Interrogation or related abilities. In the case of very long or involved interrogations, the Storyteller may charge the nova 3 quantum points for the scene. Although characters might use this to see through subterfuges, this enhancement can't be used to make lies more believable.

Lure

While many grifters have been accused of “leading people on”, in some of those cases the term is all too accurate. A Mega-Manipulative nova with this enhancement can place a powerful, albeit temporary, compulsion into the psyche of a chosen target. Given the chance to engage the target in a little light banter, the nova can ensure that his or her target will be all but consumed with the need to both find the nova and then do something appropriate to him or her. This enhancement is equally useful on or off the battlefield. A nova elite might use this to draw a vengeful enemy of his into a deathtrap, while a nova socialite might use this to get a handsome young man that she's had her eyes on somewhere where they can be alone.

System: The nova spends either 1 or 3 quantum points and then pits his Manipulation + Subterfuge against the Willpower of his chosen target. If the nova achieves more net successes than his target, the target will feel a deep-seated compulsion to seek out and find the nova for one reason or another. A target

affected by this enhancement will ignore everything in favor of searching out the nova, and must make a Willpower roll against the nova's Mega-Manipulation in order to pay anything more than passing attention to other matters. The effects of this enhancement will last until the duration ends or until the target comes within three meters of the nova. This effect lasts for 1 scene if only 1 quantum point is spent; if 3 quantum points were spent the effect can last for up to [the nova's Mega-Manipulation] hours.

Mediator

A nova with this enhancement is a born diplomat, and is able to help all but the most intransigent of people to get along and be agreeable with one another. Such novas are in great demand to work in institutions like the United Nations, and are heavily recruited by Project Utopia for their Diplomacy Corps.

System: Whenever the nova is involved in situations where the Diplomacy Ability (from the **Aberrant Player's Guide**, pg. 88-89) may be used, the player receives three automatic successes on any Diplomacy rolls he makes. The nova spends 1 quantum point to activate this enhancement, and the effect lasts for the duration of the scene.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Prerequisites: Mega-Manipulation at 6+ dots and Trickster

While Mega-Manipulation allows novas to influence other people in startling ways, those who develop the upper reaches of Mega-Manipulation can influence others in truly subtle – and frightening – ways. Although often mistaken for a form of precognition, this enhancement actually allows a Mega-Manipulative nova to covertly program another person's subconscious mind to do his bidding. While often used to covertly punish people who have offended a grifter with this enhancement, some grifters have been known to use it to bring down wrongdoers who would have otherwise escaped the consequences of their crimes.

System: The nova pays 1 quantum point, states a prophecy and pits his Manipulation in a resisted roll against the victim's Willpower. If the nova gets even a single success, he has subconsciously convinced the victim that the “prophecy” is true. Thereafter the victim will unknowingly seek out conditions that will allow the prophesied event to occur. Also, each net success gained by the nova on the Manipulation roll will subtract 1 die from the victim's dice pool in appropriate conditions. (A victim's dice pool that is affected in this manner cannot be lowered beyond one die, however.) The victim may spend a point of Willpower to ignore this effect, but will not be able to regain Willpower points spent in this manner until the duration of this enhancement ends.

The effects of this enhancement will last until either the prophesied event actually occurs, or for a number of days equal to the net amount of successes gained by the nova on the Manipulation roll. However, in a manner similar to the “Creeping Paranoia” enhancement, this duration of this enhancement's effects can be extended. Just making eye contact with the nova will do it if the victim meets him in person; but hearing his voice, regardless of whether or not he even mentions the victim's prophesied fate, will also be sufficient. In either case the nova must spend another quantum point to reset the duration to its

initial length. The duration will also extended if the victim “has a close call”, i.e. he or she has had to spend one or more Willpower points in order to ignore the effect.

Example: Irritated by the muckraking tactics of a reporter by the name of Jane Huffington, nova Peter Herrera prophesies in public that Ms. Huffington will soon drown. He uses this enhancement when making his prophecy, and scores 4 net successes on his Manipulation roll against Jane's Willpower. For the next four days and for no discernable reason, Jane is mysteriously and continually finding herself to be in close proximity to large bodies of water. Finally, when she happens to carelessly lean on the railing of a low bridge over a river, Jane botches her athletics roll (her Athletics dice pool is 4, so she only rolls one die) and falls into the water. Fortunately for her, Jane spends a point of Willpower to temporarily ignore the effect of Peter's prophecy and swims to safety. Badly shaken, she is more convinced than ever the prophecy is real.

Subtle

Some Mega-Manipulative novas are so skilled in the social arena that you'll never see them coming... until it's too late. A grifter with this enhancement can use his Social Mega-Attributes to their full effect without appearing superhuman to any onlookers in the process. This enhancement provides no protection against being discovered as a nova (via use of the M-R node, certain quantum powers, etc.). However, when the nova uses his Social Mega-Attributes or enhancements their effects will always seem to be within the bounds of possibility for normal humans as far as any onlookers can tell.

System: This enhancement costs 1 quantum point to activate and lasts for 1 scene. It provides no protection from being detected as a nova through the use of the Node background, certain quantum powers or other paranormal methods. It does distort individuals' perceptions, as it keeps the nova's Social Mega-Attributes and enhancements from appearing superhuman. Therefore, the grifter can use his Social Mega-Attributes to their full effect on a target, but the target won't realize that the grifter is using his Social Mega-Attributes on her. In most situations this enhancement will also add +3 bonus dice to any attempt by the grifter to use his Mega-Manipulation to persuade or deceive a victim. The enhancement tends to make the ploy or plea seem all that more reasonable, and the victim less likely to realize she is being manipulated.

Symphony of Touch

Despite what some people may think, a way with words is not the key to successfully manipulating people. The key is knowing how to get the reaction you want from someone despite what they might originally think. A nova with this enhancement has learned to get the reactions they wish from another's body rather than their conscious mind, knowing where to press to cause suffering and where to stroke to engender involuntary desire. While this enhancement is only useful when the nova can touch the person that they wish to affect, holding someone close during a dance or other similar situations could easily mask its use. Due to the possibilities it engenders, it is useful to lovers and torturers alike.

System: When the nova wishes to affect someone with this enhancement they must make a Manipulation roll. For each

success they may add one die to any roll to influence the target in a situation such as seduction or torture, where it can be blatantly or subtly presented as a stick or a carrot. This enhancement costs 1 quantum point to use on a chosen subject. This enhancement lasts for 1 scene.

Tactful

Encountering a nova can be overwhelming, but encountering a Mega-Social nova can absolutely befuddle the average baseline. Not so for a nova with this enhancement – he has learned how to apply just enough social pressure to accomplish his goals without overwhelming people. Also, the nova is so skilled with his social graces as to make the most use of his enhanced charm.

System: The nova will never overwhelm an individual with his Mega-Social attributes (unless he chooses to). He may choose to apply as many successes as he wishes to any social roll. Also, when using any other Mega-Social enhancement the nova may roll his Manipulation and add the successes as bonus dice to the rolls. This also negates the -1 social penalty associated with the Unearthly Beauty aberration.

This power costs 1 quantum point to activate and lasts for 1 scene.

Mega-Manipulation Aberrations

Most aberrations involving Mega-Manipulation are mental; they reflect a change in the normal functioning of the nova's brain. A few develop minor physical aberrations, usually of a sort that would indicate the nova's untrustworthiness in his own culture. Other aberrations might develop out of the subconscious guilt of a Mega-Manipulative nova who uses her gifts in an unjust manner. There is also a tendency for problems in communicating clearly to develop, limiting the nova's ability influence those around her. The following aberrations tend to be found only in novas with at least one dot of Mega-Manipulation. Common aberrations from **Aberrant** and the **Aberrant Player's Guide** for Mega-Manipulative novas include Bad Luck, Delusions, Jinx, Obsession, Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder, Paranoia, and Phobia.

Low-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with four to five points of permanent Taint.

- **Altered Tongue:** The tongue of a nova with this aberration has been changed in some way, usually one that reflects a common myth, superstition, or saying about manipulative folk. One nova's tongue might become forked like a snake's, while another's might turn the color of polished metallic silver. Unless the nova is in the habit of showing off his or her tongue in the manner of certain 1970s-era rock stars, this aberration is likely to remain unnoticed, barring attempts by others to become physically intimate with the nova.

- **Compulsive Blackmailer:** The nova who develops this aberration becomes driven to learn how to get leverage against anyone and everyone she can – including her supposed friends and colleagues. What's more, she knows that the best way to do so is to learn all the secrets of those she hopes to influence, and

the nova won't hesitate to betray someone's confidence if it means she'll take in a profit. Secrets that could get her vanished and/or killed are left alone – novas with this aberration are devious, not stupid. Nobody with any sense will trust the nova (if they know about her little hobby), but as the nova is likely to have assembled an impressive network of contacts and people who owe her favors, she probably won't care. There is one exception to this, though; if the nova still has family and/or a spouse that she truly, honestly cares about she will neither try to dig up dirt on them nor knowingly place them in danger with her machinations. Whenever the nova has an opportunity to uncover someone's secrets, she must roll Willpower (with a penalty equal to her permanent Taint) to avoid digging up that dirty laundry. Furthermore, if the nova is prevented from investigating anyone for 24 hours, the nova will suffer a +1 difficulty penalty on all of her rolls until she can indulge her compulsion. The nova will suffer a cumulative +1 penalty for each 24 hour-period of deprivation past the first.

- **Cowardice:** A nova with this aberration has grown very comfortable with the idea of letting others do his dirty work while he stays safe somewhere else. In fact, he's so comfortable with that idea that he's become neurotically careful about keeping his own hide intact! If the nova is ever required to place himself in physical danger, he must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to his permanent Taint) in order to avoid refusing to endanger himself. This roll is made at an additional +2 difficulty penalty if there's a risk of death. Storyteller note: Just about the only reliable way to motivate a cowardly nova in this situation is to have him threatened with greater danger than what he's refused to face... A cowardly nova will suffer an additional +1 difficulty penalty on all Social rolls with people who are required to be professionally brave (soldiers, police officers, Directive agents, etc.), provided that they know of the nova's cowardice.

- **Dictator:** Mega-Manipulative novas can usually do a good job of being a leader – they know when (and when not) to apply control over their minions, and how much control to use without being heavy-handed. For a nova with this aberration, however, there's simply no such thing as “too much control”. If the nova has any authority over other people (even if it's something as trivial as being the head of a household or a gang leader), she must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to her permanent Taint) to avoid trying to control every aspect of her minions' activities when they're under her authority. For example, a nova who's the director of a dance company would lord it over the dancers during their performances and practice sessions; but she wouldn't care much about their personal lives unless they interfered with the dancer's obligations to the dance company. This changes as the nova accumulates permanent Taint: at 6-7 dots of Taint, the scope of the nova's power-trip will widen to include all aspects of her underlings' lives. At 8-10 dots of Taint, the nova will become obsessive (as per the Addiction/Compulsion Flaw on pg. 71 of the **Aberrant Player's Guide**) about maintaining total control over her underlings – even if it means disposing of those who try to escape from her domination. Novas who develop this aberration often end up forming cults around themselves in order to satisfy their totalitarian urges.

- **Ennui:** A nova with this aberration becomes easily bored and jaded. While he still has emotions, they have become somewhat numbed. He also tends to be listless and dissatisfied with things in general. Rousing the nova from this state takes effort both on the part of the nova and his comrades. In game terms, the nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to his Taint-derived penalty on Social rolls for interactions with baselines) in order to react to anything with something other than passing interest or apathy. Some ennui-stricken novas seek to distract themselves with games of intrigue and influence – regardless of the effects on innocent bystanders.

- **Greedy:** A nova with this aberration has one main focus in his life: money. Lots of it. Family and friends are almost as inconsequential as “the good of human civilization” or “standing up for your fellow novas” as far as this nova is concerned. If the nova is offered a bribe, he must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to his permanent Taint) in order to refuse. If taking the bribe wouldn't result in people the nova cares about getting injured, the Willpower roll is made with an additional penalty of +1. These novas are the ones who drool over the prospect of overthrowing small nations for seven-figure contracts from DeVries...

- **Mega-Devious:** Mega-Manipulative novas are some of the most devious people on the planet – they can find a thousand ways to cheat, deceive, coerce and swindle a mark and get off scot-free every time. One problem with that is that some Mega-Manipulative novas learn that lesson so well that they lose sight of less-underhanded alternatives. Novas who develop this aberration compulsively use only underhanded means to achieve their goals – cheating, coercion, weaseling, duping, swindles and betrayals are just a few of the tactics favored by the Mega-Devious. These novas will work at least twice as hard to do something (even if it's something nice for a loved one) using crooked methods that could be more easily achieved with aboveground methods, as they ignore the possibilities (and benefits) of employing more honest and fair methods. Such a nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to his or her permanent Taint) in order to attempt using an honest, aboveground method of achieving a chosen goal.

- **Mischievous:** A nova with this aberration develops a strong liking for activities such as embarrassing other people, confusing them, annoying them, and freaking them out on occasion. The nova is likely to play harmless practical jokes and perpetrate deceptions whenever opportunity permits, and even his friends and loved ones are fair game as far as he's concerned! In any case, a mischievous nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to her Taint-derived penalty on Social rolls for interactions with baselines) to avoid pulling a fairly harmless prank or deception on a “good target”. The Storyteller may raise or lower this penalty in certain circumstances – this is habitual behavior, not compulsive behavior. Novas with this aberration are more likely to indulge in mischief when they're either bored or haven't had much fun lately. Mischievous novas will also suffer an additional +1 difficulty penalty on all Social rolls for interacting with those people who have the Bad Temper, Bully, Cold, or No Sense of Humor aberrations/Flaws.

- **Prankster:** Somewhat similar to novas with the Mischievous aberration, a nova with this aberration also likes to play practical jokes and elaborate deceptions on those people that she considers good targets – likely, they will be people whom the nova finds personally offensive in some way. The main difference is that the nova will see nothing wrong with inflicting serious harm on her intended target, especially if the chosen target is really offensive to her! The definition of “good target” will vary with the individual nova's personality – one nova might target people he deems immoral or unethical, while another would target people who are happy and enjoying their lives. In any case, a prankster nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to her Taint-derived penalty on Social rolls for interactions with baselines) to avoid pulling a potentially harmful prank on deception on a “good target”. The Storyteller may raise or lower this penalty in certain circumstances – this is habitual behavior, not compulsive behavior. Witnessing really offensive behavior on the part of a potential target is pretty much guaranteed to provoke a prankster nova, though!

Medium-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with six to seven points of permanent Taint.

- **Cannot Lie:** A nova with this aberration has lost the ability to tell (or otherwise communicate) something that he knows is blatantly untruthful. In layman's terms, the nova can't tell bald-faced lies. This isn't as much of a handicap (or a safety margin, depending on your point of view) as one might expect, however. The nova can still deceive others by alternate means – he can mislead by omission or equivocation, and can use illusions to the fullest if he has the appropriate quantum powers to generate them. A nova with this aberration is not compelled to talk (unless he's forced to), but if he does he'll still be able to omit details and twist definitions to suit his purposes.

- **Intrigue Junkie:** While most Mega-Manipulative novas do well enough when they must uncover mysteries and deal with conspiracies, some of them become a little too comfortable in the shadow-world of intrigue. A Mega-Manipulative nova who develops this aberration has an overwhelming attraction for mysteries and conspiracies. Whenever the nova is presented with a mystery or evidence of a plot, he must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to his permanent Taint) to resist the impulse to meddle in it or otherwise get himself involved. Given the number of existing mysteries and conspiracies to be found in **Aberrant-Era** Earth, this aberration can easily get a nova into some very dangerous situations...

- **Judas Syndrome:** A nova with this aberration has developed a very specific – albeit devastating – form of compulsive behavior. If the nova has a relationship with someone that involves the other party having to trust the nova (most socially-oriented backgrounds and a few Merits), the nova will feel driven to betray that other party in some way, usually at the worst possible moment. The Storyteller has full control over which of the nova's relationships will be affected when this aberration comes into play, as a “worst possible moment to betray someone” could come at any time. The nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to her permanent Taint) in order to resist the compulsion to betray someone. For each 24 hours after the first 24 where the nova fails to betray someone,

she will suffer a +1 penalty to all of her difficulties. It should be noted that once an ally, contact, organization, or significant other has been betrayed, the nova will have pretty much destroyed any positive regard that person or organization might have had for her. In game terms, this is usually reflected as a loss of either one dot in the appropriate Background or the appropriate Merit. If the nova survives the aftermath of her betrayal, she has a choice of either letting the Background dot or Merit be lost, or she can spend experience points in order to “buy back” the Background dot or Merit that would’ve otherwise have been lost. In the latter case the nova has either found someone new to replace the person she betrayed, or has done sufficient politicking and given enough favors to her superiors that they will allow her to retain her position in her organization.

Note: Novas with this aberration simply cannot have the True Love Merit. Ever.

- **Negotiator:** For Mega-Manipulative novas, being able to bring other people around to their point of view is usually second nature for them. A nova with this aberration has come to believe in her abilities so much that she rarely even considers the possibility of failure. Whenever the nova is involved in any form of negotiation she must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to her permanent Taint) to avoid dragging out a negotiating session for much longer than is necessary and/or sensible, unless the dispute can be settled quickly. This is due to the simple fact that the nova will not give up the attempt to help reach a compromise — unless she makes her Willpower roll, she will flat-out refuse to admit that calm, civil debate isn’t feasible (or even possible) in even the most dire situations. The nova must also make a Willpower roll (with the Taint penalty) to avoid attempting to initiate negotiations in even the most absurd circumstances. A nova with this aberration is the one who would walk up to a psychotic, tainted nova on a quantum-powered killing spree and ask him to “settle down so that we can discuss this situation like reasonable novas”.

- **Pathological Liar:** A nova with this aberration has developed a specific form of compulsive behavior that drives him to tell lies and deceive other people whenever he can. Whenever the nova has an opportunity to communicate with someone, he must roll Willpower (with a penalty equal to his permanent Taint) to avoid telling a lie. Furthermore, if the nova is prevented from communicating with (and lying to) anyone for 24 hours, the nova will suffer a +1 difficulty penalty on all of his rolls until he can lie to someone. The nova will suffer a cumulative +1 penalty for each 24 hour-period of deprivation past the first.

- **Trickster:** A nova with this aberration (a specific form of compulsive behavior) lusts after the thrill of outwitting dangerous foes. This isn’t the simple harassment of harmless and/or innocent folks — only foes who can present a genuine threat to the nova will be considered worthy targets for her mischievous activities. Depending on the situation, a “worthy target” might be a single powerful nova, a group of novas, or even a baseline organization! There doesn’t have to be any actual need for the nova to go out and pick a fight (and there usually won’t be) — the nova’s desire for the thrills of a battle of wits and skill is all the justification she thinks she needs. The

nova must choose and actively attempt to trick a dangerous target at least once every 24 hours. The nova may roll Willpower in order to restrain herself for a day, but she will suffer a cumulative +1 penalty on the Willpower roll for each day that she fights her own tendency for mischief. If the Willpower roll is failed, the nova will go looking for some trouble ASAP, even to the point of temporarily deserting her comrades if that’s what it takes to satisfy her urge.

High-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with eight or more points of permanent Taint.

- **Incredible:** The Mega-Manipulative nova who develops this aberration has what could be politely termed a “credibility problem”. Whenever he attempts to convince other people of something that he knows to be true, most (if not all) of those who listen to him will dismiss his statement out of hand. Understandably, this can make the nova rather bitter where those people are concerned — after all, they refused to believe him when he attempted to tell them the truth about something important. In game terms, whenever the nova with this aberration tries to make a statement about something that he knows to be true, anyone that’s listening to him must make a Willpower roll with a difficulty penalty equal to the nova’s permanent Taint. If the affected being scores even one success on the roll, he or she will believe the nova’s statement. Failing the roll means that the affected being will not believe the nova’s statement, regardless of the nova’s previous record for accuracy and/or honesty, unless developing circumstances prove the nova to have been correct. (It’s typically far too late for anything to be done about the situation by then, though...) A botch on the roll means that the affected being will not only disbelieve the nova’s statement, but that he or she will condemn it as utter nonsense, even after developing circumstances prove the nova to have been correct! Inspired beings with either the Common Sense Merit or the Prudence (Mega-Wits) enhancement are automatically immune to the effects of this aberration. Baselines and other non-Inspired beings with the Common Sense Merit gain a -4 difficulty bonus on the Willpower roll to resist the effects of this aberration.

- **Misinterpreted:** While most Mega-Manipulative novas are masters at getting their point across, those who develop this aberration tend to experience problems with information distortion. Whenever the nova is attempting to communicate with more than one non-Inspired being at a time, all such beings among his audience must make a Willpower roll with a penalty equal to the nova’s permanent Taint. (This aberration affects all means of communication.) Success on the roll means that the nova has gotten his message across to that baseline without any distortion. Failing the roll means that the baseline will accept a distorted account of the nova’s message (thought up by the Storyteller beforehand) as being true. Depending on the details of the nova’s message and how much it’s been distorted, this could lead to some interesting complications... A botch on the Willpower roll indicates that the baseline accepts an account of the nova’s message that’s distorted enough to pose a disastrous threat to the plans and aims of the nova with this aberration.

Note: This aberration has no effect whatsoever on the Inspired, nor does it affect baselines who don’t understand the

language used in the nova's message. For some reason, this aberration tends to be most frequently manifested by those novas who manage to set up large cults centered on themselves...

Mega-Charisma: Charmers

Heart-melting charm, undeniable self-confidence, irresistible appeal; these are just a few of the terms used in describing the charmers, novas with Mega-Charisma. Their preternatural appeal and poise has allowed charmers to literally sway the hearts and minds of multitudes. The aims of the charmers vary dramatically, though. Along with the hopeful social reformers, spokespersons for a cause, and performers there are also aspiring dictators, phony gurus, and cult leaders. Whether the charmers will prove to be either a blessing or a curse (or both) to the denizens of the Nova Age remains to be seen.

Everyone Loves A Charmer...

Aside from being naturally at home in social situations and the proverbial "life of the party", charmers derive several other benefits from their Mega-Charisma. Like their brethren, the Mega-Attractive idols, people seem to instinctively want to please a charmer. While receiving spontaneous gifts and favors is not uncommon in a charmer's life, these unasked-for boons are more often presented in hopes of gaining the charmer's friendship and/or goodwill in return. Also like the idols, charmers can often get away with murder (sometimes literally!) — people are much more willing to trust a charmer, and are usually much more forgiving of a charmer's misdeeds than they would be of another nova's. And while many novas are admired by members of the baseline (and nova) population, charmers are the most likely to be seen as positive role models for the young. Charms also rarely lack for company, as people will want to be with the charmer and will feel more important and charismatic themselves while in the charmer's presence. If a charmer doesn't already have a flock of hangers-on, sycophants, and/or "best buddies", he or she can easily befriend enough people on the spot to make up for the lack. Players of Mega-Charismatic novas are justified in taking any level of Allies, Followers, or Influence to reflect the perks of their sheer personal magnetism.

Politics and the performing arts aren't the only trades that charmers tend to excel in. The Mega-Charisma of a charmer works just as well on beasts as it does on humans, allowing charmers to train animals both quickly and extremely well. Unsurprisingly, charmers can make wonderful teachers as well, as their force of personality can keep even the most unruly of students focused on the lesson at hand. Also, not all charmers with religious leanings end up forming their own cults. While they're not common by any means, several charmers have joined a religious priesthood of one sort or another, and use their nova abilities — social and otherwise — in the service of their deity and religion.

(Storyteller Notes: As of 2015, there are no publicly-known novas operating as priests within the Fundamentalist Christian congregations. Likewise, the only branch of Islam known to have accepted novas into their priesthood is the Sufi. The Animal Training and Instruction abilities can be found on page 90 of the **Aberrant Player's Guide**.)

Finally, Mega-Charisma can allow a charmer to mitigate the effects his or her own social errors if he or she lacks the other Social Mega-Attributes. For example, a charmer who lacks Mega-Manipulation might stumble over his words, but will do so in such a charming way that everyone present forgives him and likes him all the more for his clumsiness at expressing himself.

Note: This works best for young characters.

The Perils of Personality

The major drawback of Mega-Charisma is that it typically isn't selective in the least as to who it affects. More likely than not; a charmer's Mega-Charisma will affect those people who the charmer wants to adore her, those who the charmer wants nothing at all to do with, and those who the charmer doesn't care about one way or the other — and all at the same time. Just because a charmer can win the adoration of multitudes does not mean that she will return their warm feelings wholesale! Here's a thought experiment for you: imagine that suddenly, everyone at your local grocery market decided that you were the most absolutely wonderful person and they all wanted to be your friend. Would you treat them all equally? Would you even want all of those people as your friends? Multiply that scenario several times over, and you have a rough estimate of what a charmer gets to look forwards to when in public. Then there's the very real chance that a charmer can truly be too Mega-Charismatic for his own good. While this problem is most often encountered by the Mega-Attractive idols, charmers have also been known to be the focus of people with obsessive and/or addictive personalities. Baseline stalkers are bad enough — but what if it's another nova that's stalking the charmer in question? It's also possible for someone to adore a charmer to the point that he or she will do anything to keep the charmer safe or to keep others from having the charmer... *anything*. Another problem that charmers have in common with the Mega-Attractive idols is the tendency for some people to develop strong feelings of personal inadequacy when confronted with a charmer's superhuman personal magnetism. These people (who are usually baselines, but occasionally other novas as well) will hesitate to approach the charmer in question or perform even the simplest social interactions with that charmer.

The other problems associated with being Mega-Charismatic are psychological, and are often the result of having an overly-stroked ego. As some charmers are worshipped in all but name by their admirers, this is a very real danger... First off, there's a tendency for some Mega-Charismatic novas who are in leadership positions to have difficulties in connecting emotionally with their followers. (It's hard for a charmer to get a clear idea of a person's emotional well-being if he or she is always overcome with worshipful awe whenever the charmer is around him or her.) Other charmers will see the leeway that other people afford them due to their Mega-Charisma as an invitation to "push the envelope", and see just how much they can get away with. The results of such experiments have been

mixed to say the least, but most people (baseline and nova alike) do have limits as to what they will tolerate. Having hordes of admirers that are willing to do anything for their common object of affection can lead to a temptation on the charmer's part to use or abuse said admirers. Late-night groupie parties (in the manner of rock stars from the late 20th Century) are the most common result of this, but dark rumors of more worrisome happenings do surface from time to time. Finally, a few charmers who use their talents in a leadership capacity have been known to develop what's become known as the Shepherd's Syndrome. More of an attitude problem than an actual mental disorder, this manifests as a tendency for the charmer to see those under his or her command as children (at best) or as pets or livestock (at worst). In any case, the charmer with Shepherd's Syndrome will always see those under his or her command (usually baselines, but possibly other novas as well) as being totally unable to function effectively or even take care of themselves properly without the charmer's leadership.

To Be The One They Love... ...To Hate

While most uses of Mega-Charisma are based on the assumption that it makes other people experience strong positive emotions with the charmer as the focus, it is also possible for Mega-Charisma to inspire equally strong negative emotions as well. All a charmer has to do is simply use his or her Mega-Charisma in an anti-social manner. Where normal Mega-Charisma makes other people want to like and please the charmer, anti-social Mega-Charisma makes other people actively want to dislike and displease the nova. While using Mega-Charisma in this manner tends to be more trouble than it's worth, it is a viable means of emotionally manipulating people who are already inclined to hate either novas in general or the Mega-Charismatic nova in particular.

Problems can also crop up for a charmer if he or she happens to either act on behalf of or espouse the beliefs of a organization that is known to be actively inimical to another widespread social group or category of people. When members of the organization a charmer is associated with commit deeds that are considered evil by the general populace, the bad publicity from those deeds will eventually stack difficulty penalties on all of the charmer's attempts to influence members of said general populace. It should also be noted that it's possible for a charmer (or any nova, really) to be falsely associated with an inimical organization in much the same manner that Joseph McCarthy falsely branded innocent U.S. citizens as members of the Communist Party in the 1950's. Also, if a charmer commits an actual or perceived betrayal of a social group — even one as broad and ill-defined as “humanity in general” — then that charmer can also find him — or herself beset with increasing difficulty penalties on attempts to influence members of the betrayed social group.

The premier example of a charmer who most certainly will find himself in this situation in the years after 2015 would be Count Raoul Orzaiz. While Orzaiz still enjoys (and makes excellent use of) the good press presently afforded him by the media, his effectiveness as the Teragen's top PR man is sure to plunge dramatically once the Teragen as a whole starts engaging

in acts of terror against the baseline populace as a whole. When the Aberrant War finally begins in 2046, charmers in general may find that being liked on a personal basis won't do much to protect them from becoming targets of rampaging, bloodthirsty mobs.

Roleplaying Mega-Charisma

If you intend to play a Mega-Charismatic character, try to imagine the treatment that a charmer can expect from other people. How will your character react to being lavished with praise and adoration by practically everyone she meets? Will she allow her ego to grow overly large as a result? Will she decide to dismiss that praise out of hand as mindless sycophancy? What would happen if the praise and adoration comes from someone whom the charmer actually respects and admires herself?

Then there's the question of how the charmer will deal with the inevitable offers and favors that his admirers will offer him. Will a charmer politely decline the offer of a gaggle of pretty teenaged fangirls to share his king-size bed for the night, or will he take the opportunity to indulge in debauchery? Will receiving the proverbial “red-carpet” treatment at fancy restaurants and hotels on a regular basis result in the charmer developing a sense of entitlement, or will he see fit to repay that kindness in return? Or will the charmer become nostalgic for the days when he was treated as a more-or-less normal person instead?

How will a charmer react to having people around her who not only hang on her every word, but will do almost anything it takes in order to win the charmer's approval and friendship? Will the charmer use her would-be friends as disposable toys for her amusement, or will she do her best to keep those overeager fools from doing something rash in their attempts to impress her? Will the charmer simply use (or abuse) her admirers as convenient tools to get what she wants, or will she treat them with the respect that people deserve? Will the charmer even deign to take any notice of her admirers or their antics in the first place?

In the end, it all boils down to two simple questions. How will the charmer treat the people that his or her Mega-Charisma has bewitched? And what will the consequences of that treatment be?

New Mega-Charisma Enhancements

Additional enhancements that characters with Mega-Charisma may learn or purchase include:

Autonomy

Despite the Hollywood myth of rugged individualism, all humans (and most novas) remain extremely social creatures. The saying that “no man is an island” isn't just a cliché, but is part and parcel of our evolution as social beings. Clint Eastwood aside, a human's sense of self-worth is almost entirely dependent on the admiration of and reassurance by his or her social peers. The varied problems of belonging to a social group are inescapable for the most part, as socially isolated humans inevitably become depressed and suffer from poor health as a

result of their alienation. Usually, these ostracized humans die an early death.

A Mega-Charismatic nova with this enhancement is the exception to that rule, as his evolved psyche allows him to survive in social circumstances that would quickly drive a baseline to a premature death. The near-indestructible sense of self-worth possessed by an Autonomous nova not only allows him to function effectively without the support or approval of a social group, but also lets him excel in the social arena. As Autonomous novas are unfazed by emotional and social pressures, the effects of this enhancement superficially resemble and are sometimes mistaken for actual mental illness. Understandably, this misperception makes many researchers into nova psychology rather worried. A few such researchers have made spurious claims that Autonomous novas actually suffer from Psychotic Dissociation. Lkening the social group to a multicellular organism, they have declared Autonomous novas to be the social equivalent of cancer cells: rogue individuals who benefit by putting their own needs before that of the social group. That bit of pseudoscientific tripe is ridiculed by the scientific mainstream, although it receives enthusiastic support from the Church of Michael Archangel and other anti-nova organizations.

System: The nova can sustain himself emotionally and psychologically for an indefinite period on residual quantum energies, so long as he retains at least one quantum point in his Quantum Pool. The Autonomous nova has no need for (but still enjoys and will desire) social attachments, the affection and friendship of others, or social recognition. He can also survive indefinitely in hostile social environments such as physical and/or social isolation from other people, extreme social pressures, all forms of degrading circumstances, and functioning within a hostile (prejudiced, hateful, fearful, or paranoid) social group. The nova is automatically immune to implanted suggestions, delusions, and compulsions (either via mundane mind-control and brainwashing methods or nova techniques such as Hypnotism and Creeping Paranoia), detrimental aspects of group psychology such as mass hysteria and the mob mentality, psychosomatic damage and illness, and the long-term effects of Social Mega-Attributes. The nova also gains six extra Willpower successes against Empathic Manipulation and/or any social ability or power that lasts longer than one scene. Finally, the nova's social perceptions will automatically adjust to his current environment, allowing him to accurately perceive real threats (or the lack of same) and opportunities in surroundings that he may be unfamiliar with.

Note: Autonomous novas still retain their full capacity to enjoy social ties, the affection and friendship of other people, and social recognition. Autonomy simply allows a nova to survive without them when necessary. It's like always having the option of being automatically fed intravenously in case of famine – the stuff in the I.V. drip will sustain human life, but it's nowhere near as pleasurable as eating a meal at a good restaurant. As both novas and baseline humans tend to seek pleasure for its own sake, Autonomous novas will most definitely seek to form and maintain emotional and social attachments with other people when possible. This differs greatly from actual cases of Psychotic Dissociation, in which the victim doesn't feel the need

for and has no capacity to form social and emotional attachments to other people.

Bestial Rapport

Most Mega-Charismatic novas tend to focus on influencing other people, but a few have learned how to use their superhuman force of personality on a more feral level. These novas can swim with hungry tiger sharks, stalk through the Amazon rain forest with a jaguar, or fish for salmon with Kodiak grizzly bears without any concerns about their safety. These novas also make excellent animal trainers; and can handle domestic pets, livestock, and wild animals with equal ease.

System: A nova with this enhancement can instantly befriend and communicate (via body language and sounds) with any animals he might encounter. Animals will regard the nova as a friend and boon companion unless he does something to prove otherwise. They won't harm the nova, and they will seek to prevent others from harming him as well. If the nova has any dots in the Animal Mastery power (**Aberrant** core book, pp. 182-183), he can communicate with animals without having to roll. This enhancement also grants the nova 3 automatic successes on all rolls for the Animal Training ability (**Aberrant Player's Guide**, pg. 90). This enhancement is always in effect and costs no quantum points to activate.

Disconcerting

Despite what some may think, not all of the forms of charisma (and therefore Mega-Charisma) are pleasant. Case in point: A nova with this enhancement can use her superhuman force of personality offensively, as her glare is enough to cow even the boldest of baselines.

System: The nova automatically wins all stare downs (a form of the Intimidation ability) against non-Inspired beings and receives +3 automatic successes on stare downs against Inspired opponents. The nova may also temporarily stun a non-Inspired target with her superhuman force of personality via his gaze. To do so, the nova makes eye contact with the intended target (who must have a Willpower score that's equal to or lower than the nova's base Charisma rating). The nova then rolls Intimidation with a difficulty penalty of +1. Success forces the subject to lose his next combat action (if in combat) or automatically fail his next opposed Social roll (if out of combat). This enhancement is always in effect and costs no quantum points to activate. Fortunately(?), a nova is limited to using the secondary function of this enhancement only twice per day against any one individual.

Look of Love

While all Mega-Charismatic novas exhibit superhuman personal appeal, those with this enhancement have developed it to the point where they can make anyone who is sexually attracted to the nova fall in love with them just by gazing into their eyes. While this enhancement has its greatest effect when used by a Mega-Charismatic nova who happens to be love struck with her target herself, others have used it to become the Don Juans and femmes fatale of the Nova Age, leaving broken hearts and shattered lives in their wake. These quantum-powered heartbreakers also tend to rack up a large roster of enemies in short order.

System: If the nova can establish eye contact with her chosen target, she can spend 1 quantum point to use this enhancement. The nova then pits her Mega-Charisma against her target's Willpower in a resisted roll. If the nova is insincere in her attempt to sway her target's heart (read: has no real romantic feelings for the target, and only wants to exploit the target in some way), she will suffer a difficulty penalty of +3 on the Mega-Charisma roll. If the nova's target happens to already be in a loving and committed romantic relationship, the nova will suffer a difficulty penalty of +2 on the Mega-Charisma roll. These penalties are cumulative if both circumstances apply to the target. The number of net successes gained by the nova determines the degree of lovesickness that her target will develop. One success indicates a mild crush, while 5 or more indicates a haunting obsession. Unless the target has some means to detect emotion-controlling effects used against him or her, he or she will have no reason (at first) to believe that his or her romantic feelings for the nova aren't genuine. Depending on how matters develop in the target's relationship with the nova, those feelings may soon actually become genuine!

There are two limitations to this enhancement's effects, however. First off, this enhancement is nowhere near as powerful (or as short-lived) as the effect of the Empathic Manipulation power; the lovesick state this induces is no different from normal instances of romantic love. The effects of this enhancement can last for decades (or even longer, in the case of nova paramours), but the romantic relationship must be maintained and kept intact once it's established; as it's just as vulnerable to the effects of infidelity, neglect or heartbreak as those of baseline humans. Second, this enhancement simply will not function at all when used on a target who is not sexually oriented towards members of the nova's gender.

Pavlov's Bell

The mood of a nova who possesses Mega-Charisma can have an effect on those around them, their approval arousing a warm and "good" feeling in others. Those novas who have developed this enhancement have learned to focus this effect in a useful manner, using their approval at a lesson learned to help others concentrate on the lesson that the nova is teaching. There is a darker side to this though: this same effect can be used to literally train people into reacting in a certain manner when presented with a certain stimulus, like Pavlov's dog salivating upon hearing the sound of a bell.

System: The nova may add a number of dice equal to their Mega-Charisma rating to any Animal Training or Instruction rolls they make, whether made to instruct a single individual or a group. By focusing this enhancement on an individual, the nova may instill a certain reflex into that person regardless of whether they know they are being trained or not. Each time the appropriate stimulus presents itself and the subject reacts in the desired manner in the nova's presence, the nova may spend a quantum point to "reward" the subject and rolls Charisma. After a number of successful rolls have been made in this manner (usually one successful roll per point of the subject's permanent Willpower rating), the subject must spend a Willpower when presented with the stimulus or reflexively react in the same manner. Once instilled, the new reflex remains until the nova ceases reinforcing it. The new reflex must be reinforced at least

once per week, and will cost 1 quantum point to do so. Otherwise, the new reflex will last for one day beyond the deadline per dot of Mega-Charisma the nova possesses. One quantum point will activate this enhancement for the scene, but as noted above an additional point must be spent each time an individual's behavior is "reinforced".

Pedagogue

A few Mega-Charismatic novas have developed superhuman skills as teachers — these novas can attract and hold the attention of even the most unruly, apathetic or distracted students, and impart the chosen lessons with masterful skill. While novas with this enhancement are in demand for the instruction of newly-erupted novas, many wealthy baselines will tender very attractive offers to act as private tutors for their children.

System: The nova spends 1 quantum point to activate this enhancement, and then makes a Charisma + Instruction roll. For each success the nova gains, he can temporarily enhance the natural learning capacity of up to [the nova's Mega-Charisma] Inspired students or [the nova's Mega-Charisma x 3] non-Inspired students. Students affected by this enhancement will have their experience point costs for learning the Ability the nova is instructing them in reduced by 50% (down to a minimum cost of 1 experience point). All other benefits and limitations of the Instruction ability (*Aberrant Player's Guide*, pg. 90) still apply as normal. The nova can also ignore up to [the nova's Mega-Charisma] of any difficulty penalties on Instruction rolls that are derived from having to teach uninterested, unruly, or inattentive students. The effects of this enhancement will end when the nova's student actually gains the next dot of the Ability that he or she was being instructed in by the nova.

Persona

Persona is the psychological counterpart to the Copycat and Metamorph enhancements, as it lets the nova temporarily rearrange his thought processes into a two-tiered structure. The first tier is a "psychic façade personality" that duplicates another person's mind and conceals the second tier (his own psyche) from telepathic inspection. Aside from the obvious benefits for deceiving telepaths and in aiding one's infiltration attempts; this form of psychic mimicry can grant a nova a truly stunning ability as an actor, as it puts a whole new twist on "getting in character".

System: Persona allows a nova to roll his Charisma in order to "overlay" his own psyche with that of another person. Each success on the Charisma roll adds a +1 difficulty penalty on all rolls (usually for Telepathy) made to pierce the nova's psychic façade. Alternatively, it can grant 3 automatic successes on any Perform rolls made to portray the duplicated person in a movie or theatrical play.

The nova must either be in the presence of the person he intends to psychically duplicate, or he must have had deep insight into that person's mind (either from intense study of the person's psychological profile or prior telepathic contact) for this enhancement to function. In the case of fictional characters, in-depth research of the character in question (and a discussion with the character's creator, if possible) will be sufficient for this enhancement to function. The changes take less than a

second to make. It should be noted that unlike the “Psychic Mimic Multiple Personality Disorder” that the Terat known as Turncoat suffers from, a nova using Persona will never lose control of himself to his psychic façade personality.

Persona costs 1 quantum point to activate, and the changes last for a scene.

Persona does not let the nova remove noticeable psychic features (such as certain mental disorders and mental aberrations) from his mind — novas with Persona who suffer from such ailments are advised to limit their impersonations to either relative nobodies or people with established reputations as eccentrics.

Politesse

As any serious world traveler could tell you, knowing and following the local rules of good behavior in a foreign culture isn't just a matter of being a good guest — it can literally be a lifesaver. A Mega-Charismatic nova with this enhancement has no need to worry about inadvertently making social *faux pas* in any human society, as he has a near-psychic capability to intuit whatever rules of proper behavior that hold sway in the culture he's currently interacting with. As a result, the nova can also follow those rules (if he wants to) with an ease that few of those who belong to the culture in question could match.

System: The nova with this enhancement automatically has his difficulty penalties reduced by [the nova's Mega-Charisma] points on any roll that involves knowing what is locally considered polite behavior — this usually means Etiquette rolls, but can apply to certain Streetwise rolls as well. The nova also receives three automatic successes on any Etiquette or Streetwise roll that involves acting in accordance with polite behavior. This enhancement is always in effect and costs no quantum points to activate.

Rancor

While most Mega-Charismatic novas use their superhuman force of personality in order to make themselves likeable and attractive, a few have learned to use their Mega-Charisma in the opposite manner. A nova with this enhancement can emanate enough hatred and bitterness to make most people instinctively keep their distance from her. It's even worse when a Rancorous nova fixes her gaze on someone in particular, as a venomous glare is all she'll need to drive an unfortunate victim from her sight. It should be noted that using this enhancement is not at all conducive to inspiring goodwill or loyalty in one's peers. Indiscriminate and/or inappropriate use of Rancor can easily leave the nova friendless just when she needs them the most.

System: The nova spends 1 quantum point to activate this enhancement for a scene. Everyone nearby (including the Rancorous nova's friends and allies) will feel the urge to get as far away from the nova as possible. If a subject still wants to approach the Rancorous nova, he must make a Willpower roll (with a difficulty penalty equal to the nova's Mega-Charisma) in order to do so. A Rancorous nova also gains a bonus of + 3 dice on all Intimidation rolls while using this enhancement.

If she so desires, the Rancorous nova can concentrate all that hatred and bitterness she's emanating into a glare that can drive a chosen victim from her sight. In this case, the Rancorous nova pits her Mega-Charisma against the victim's Willpower in a

resisted roll. Failure on the victim's part will result in his or her backing off or otherwise folding if the Rancorous nova gains 1 success; further successes indicates that the victim might flee the scene, burst into tears, or do something equally melodramatic as a result of his or her emotional trauma. As a side-effect, from that point onwards the victim will be totally unable to think of the Rancorous nova in a positive way without Inspired aid or extensive mental therapy.

Note: Any powers, effects or devices that protect against emotion-controlling powers will automatically provide additional successes on any Willpower rolls made to resist this enhancement.

Rile

Some people can really get under others' skins; like the sound of fingernails on a chalkboard, something about them just rubs other people in exactly the wrong way. A nova with this enhancement can take advantage of his superhuman obnoxiousness to make one or more of his targets explode with anger, with the usual result being a murderous hatred that's focused on the nova...

System: The nova spends either 1 quantum point (for a single target) or 3 quantum points (for a group of targets) to activate this enhancement for a scene. The nova then pits his Mega-Charisma in a resisted roll against one or more targets' Willpower. When used in combat or other violent situations, any targets who fail the Willpower roll must personally attack the nova, regardless of their ability to harm him and ignoring any strategic and/or tactical knowledge they might have. In their frenzied rush to attack they will disregard common sense, even to the point of abandoning master plans or injuring their allies. They must use the most immediate and direct way of attacking the nova, although if they have a choice of direct attack methods they may choose between them. When used outside of combat, targets will usually lose their cool and verbally (loudly and at length) assault the nova, although if they fail by enough successes (Storyteller's choice) they can also be forced into physically attacking the nova. The nova can also choose whether or not this enhancement will affect friendly and non-hostile forces on a case-by-case basis. Normally, but not always, this enhancement is triggered by the nova saying something offensive to his targets to cut them down. Certain hand gestures can also serve as effective triggers.

Mega-Charisma Aberrations

Mega-Charismatic aberrations are usually mental in nature, as one or more certain portions of the nova's brain structure that are used in social interaction are warped by Taint accumulation. Any physical aberrations will usually involve the larynx, and alter the nova's speaking voice in some way. Aberrations that can act as “personality tags” may also be manifested. Other aberrations are based on the difficulties of being too charismatic for one's own good... The following aberrations tend to be found only in novas with at least one dot of Mega-Charisma.

Common aberrations from **Aberrant** and the **Aberrant Player's Guide** for Mega-Charismatic novas include Anima Banner, Bipolar Disorder, Disturbing Voice, Hormonal Imbalance

(Lust), Megalomania, Obsession, Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder, and Schizophrenia.

Note: Aberrations marked with an * are from the *Aberrant Compendium*.

Low-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with four to five points of permanent Taint.

- **Convivial:** For a nova who develops this aberration, the company of other people (preferably in large numbers) is absolutely vital to his psychological well-being. This outright addiction to frequent social contact will lead the nova to ignore up to 2 points of any difficulty penalties on Social rolls that would otherwise apply – say, like when a highly-tainted nova tries to associate with her less-tainted colleagues... The nova will be utterly miserable when alone, and will suffer a +2 difficulty penalty on all Mental rolls when isolated in this manner. (**Storyteller Note:** This must be roleplayed!) If the nova is in a group of four or less, he'll be somewhat less than miserable, but he won't exactly be happy, either. In this case, the nova suffers only a +1 difficulty penalty on all Mental rolls until he's around a larger group of people.

- **Fanatic:** People have dedicated their lives to various causes throughout human history. Why should one expect novas to be any different? A nova with this aberration believes strongly enough in a given cause (his country, religion, faction, what-have-you) that he is willing to put it ahead of everything else in his life. If following his chosen cause means adhering to a defined code of behavior, he'll follow that rigidly, no matter what those people who don't work for the cause say about him. If the cause requires obedience to a leader, the nova will serve with total loyalty. In game terms, the nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to his permanent Taint) to disobey the dictates of his cause in even the slightest way.

- **Flippant:** Novas with this aberration are nearly incapable of taking anything seriously. They will make jokes about a man's many illicit love affairs while speaking at his funeral! For some reason, they never quite manage to figure out why some of their audiences tend to turn hostile towards them... As could only be expected, this lack of respect for social status, propriety, and the world in general tends to make these novas somewhat difficult to get along with. There's one exception to this, though: Flippant novas won't joke about things and events that they find horrifying. (This is the major difference between this aberration and Twisted Sense of Humor – see the listing below for details.) In all social situations where seriousness, politeness and courtesy are expected; these novas will suffer a difficulty penalty of +2 in addition to the normal Taint-derived penalty for social interaction with baselines. For ease of comparison, Morph (from Marvel Comics' "Age of Apocalypse" and "Exiles" titles) is a great example of a nova with this aberration.

- **Four-Color Caricature:** Possibly as a result of reading too many third-rate comics as a kid, a nova with this aberration has bought heavily into the lore of the four-color superhero (or supervillain). This specific form of delusion will lead the nova to wear an outlandish costume (complete with utility belt), give unbearably corny speeches, and generally act as if he'd just stepped out of a Super Friends episode. This kind of behavior is extremely embarrassing to most other novas, who will ostracize

and/or mock the nova if given the chance. In game terms, a nova with this aberration suffers a +2 difficulty penalty on all Social rolls with other novas who don't share his four-color worldview. While many baselines will idolize the nova as a living incarnation of what they think all novas should be; those with common sense will tend to think that the nova is 1: a clownish fool, 2: certifiably insane, 3: an elite wannabe, or 4: all of the above. The nova is quite likely to be a regular subject of trashy tabloid newspapers.

Note: For some reason, all novas who develop this aberration possess neither the Common Sense Merit nor the Prudence enhancement of Mega-Wits.

- **Gravitas:** For ancient Romans during the non-decadent phases of the Empire, being serious wasn't just a personality trait – it was a virtue to be upheld and practiced for the entirety of one's adult life. A nova with this aberration has taken this idea to an extreme; as he will comport himself in a serious, stern, and grave manner at all times. Even little things like cracking a smile or chuckling at a good joke are useless frivolities where a nova with this aberration is concerned. In game terms, the nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to his permanent Taint) in order to express any "frivolous" feelings of enthusiasm, happiness, joy, or amusement that he might feel. This pathological dourness will result in an additional +2 difficulty penalty on all Social rolls on interactions with other people (including other novas) where expressing levity and happiness is either expected or would be of benefit to the nova. Understandably, these novas don't get invited to many parties. This difficulty penalty is doubled in the case of novas with the Flippant, Twisted Sense of Humor, or Mischievous aberrations. Unless those novas have some means of detecting the emotions of the nova with this aberration, they will see him as either an excellent butt for their jests or as a stick-in-the-mud that's in serious need of lightening up. As one could expect, their attempts to amuse the nova with this aberration rarely work out very well. Oddly enough, the nova will receive a -2 difficulty bonus on Social rolls for interactions with novas who have the "No Sense of Humor" aberration, as they will appreciate the serious demeanor of a nova with this aberration.

- **Screwball Magnet:** A nova with this aberration is so likable and charming that she can attract friendly people to her without even trying. Unfortunately for the nova, not one of these new friends will be quite right in the head. All kinds of confused, eccentric, and downright insane people (including novas gone mad due to mental aberration) will regard the nova as being both appealing and sympathetic. They will invariably have a good initial reaction to the nova; and will want to tell her their life stories, whacked-out conspiracy theories, personal delusions, and so on. After having to listen about why scuba gear is vital attire for formal parties, how Project Utopia and the Teragen are both unwitting pawns of a conspiracy to prevent Lyndon LaRouche from saving Western Civilization from domination by the British Royal Family, and that the U.N. is secretly run by a hidden colony of genetically engineered hyperintelligent ringtail lemurs; even the most tolerant nova might become something of a recluse – or a misanthrope.

- **Soft Touch:** A nova with this aberration has simply lost most of his better judgment where his compassion for other people is concerned. If a panhandler asks him for some change,

the nova will tend to be too open-handed to refuse, and will likely give cash instead of coins. If the nova sees someone in distress, he'll more than likely rush over and give whatever aid he can, even if he has pressing business elsewhere. The nova will listen sincerely to requests for large-scale financial aid and charitable donations where others would brush them off – he tends to fall for good hard-luck stories. (If the nova's flat broke at the time, he'll make profuse apologies for not being able to help out.) And yes, the nova will do his best to rescue kittens that have climbed up trees and are too scared to get back down by themselves. Note that novas with this aberration aren't hopeless suckers – they simply tend to feel guilty over having won their novahood in what is essentially a genetic lottery, and being better off than so many ordinary humans as a result. In game terms, the nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to his permanent Taint) to avoid giving some sort of aid to those in genuine need, even if ignoring the situation would be for his own benefit or that of the greater good. While this presents obvious difficulties in successfully carrying out missions, the nova will likely gain a positive reputation among devout Buddhists, Muslims, and many varieties of Christians; as well as the people he has helped.

- **Tactless:** Mega-Charismatic novas who develop this aberration become somewhat apathetic to the needs and feelings of other people. While having Mega-Charisma ensures that others will find them likable (at first), they tend to have both the sensitivity of a cinder block and a near-incomprehension of tact. As can be expected, this brutal honesty can make social interactions difficult, even with other novas. Novas with this aberration have to make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to his or her Taint-derived penalty on Social rolls for interactions with baselines) to avoid saying exactly what they think about a situation, regardless of whether their words would cause other people pain and/or anger. Also, novas with this aberration cannot possess or develop the Natural Empathy enhancement of Mega-Wits.

- **Twisted Sense of Humor:** Due to a slight structural alteration in a certain area of her brain, the nova with this aberration gradually starts expanding her definition of what's amusing. The nova will tend to find humor in even the most horrifying situations – what's more, she must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to her permanent Taint) to keep from expressing her amusement in some way. Note that this isn't a defense mechanism against the horrors of gruesome sights – the nova genuinely sees that sort of thing as being funny! This differs from Flippant in that nothing is sacred to a nova with this aberration – if she found her mother had committed suicide with a shotgun, she would make jokes about her old lady “going out with a bang.” Understandably, the nova will suffer an additional +3 difficulty penalty on her Social rolls for interacting with people who don't share her definition of humor. She may also suffer greater penalties on her Social rolls with anyone who was close to the victim(s) of a horrific event that the nova jokes about. For ease of comparison, the Joker (from DC Comics) is the hands-down classic example of a nova with this aberration. If you're looking for a comedian with a healthier sense of humor, see the Flippant aberration (listed above).

Medium-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with six to seven points of permanent Taint.

- **Glory Hound:** This aberration is an extreme version of the Overconfidence Flaw (see the **Aberrant Player's Guide**, page 72). Whereas overconfident novas tend to overestimate their abilities, a nova with this aberration will do so to an absurd degree. She will invariably insist on doing whatever it takes to be in the spotlight – she'll take the greatest risks, lead the charge, and make complex plans that hinge on her abilities. In any situation where an assessment of the nova's abilities is a factor, the Storyteller will make glaringly obvious exaggerations. The nova must also make a Willpower roll at a difficulty penalty equal to her Taint-derived penalty on Social rolls for interacting with baselines to back down from a direct challenge to her abilities. Side effects of this aberration include a willingness to talk to the media, pose for photographs or video cameras, and sign autographs at the slightest opportunity. The nova may make a Willpower roll to resist the effects of this aberration for one scene, but will feel distinctly uncomfortable doing so. Novas with this aberration tend to be adored by the media, children, and teenagers; but are likewise regarded as egotistical jerks by their colleagues and fellow novas.

- **Heartthrob*:** Mega-Charismatic novas with the Seductive enhancement may also develop this aberration – see the full-length listing under Mega-Appearance aberrations for details.

- **Hubris:** Ever since the time of ancient Greece, scholars have known the dangers of hubris. This mixture of overweening pride, overconfidence and arrogance has been the downfall of many baselines throughout human history. How much more dangerous is it, then, when developed by a nova? A nova with this specific form of delusion will look down her nose at novas from factions other than her own, not to mention less-powerful novas from her own faction. (And that's not even touching on her extremely low opinion of baselines!) The nova will consider herself to be the perfect choice to lead whatever group she deigns to associate with, and also the nova best-suited for any task. Keeping the condescension and disdain out of her voice when dealing with other people is a difficult trial for her at best. Aside from suffering the effects of the Overconfidence Flaw (see the **Aberrant Player's Guide**, page 72), a nova with this aberration must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to her permanent Taint) to avoid acting like a conceited, elitist jerk. This behavior will make the nova unpopular, netting her an additional +2 difficulty penalty on all Social rolls with those people she sees as her inferiors (read: just about everyone else). A hubris-stricken nova will also have trouble accepting responsibility for her own failures, and will instead place the blame on one of her “inferiors”.

Note: Hubris-stricken novas don't get along at all with novas who have the Glory Hound aberration – in this case, any social difficulty penalties that may apply are doubled!

- **Party Animal:** A nova with this aberration has a hard time resisting the urge to party, and he will usually do so at the drop of a hat. The nova will try any kind of pharmaceutical party favor or beverage that is offered to him; and isn't picky about his romantic partners, provided that they're hot. He likes his music loud and trendy, and prefers to wake up at the crack of

noon to a cold beer. If the nova isn't already a regular at places like the Phoenix Room (a.k.a. the Amp Room prior to 2015) or StarLord's Cafe yet, he soon will be. In game terms, the nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to his permanent Taint) to avoid joining or starting a party whenever the opportunity presents itself, even if the party is one that the nova should avoid attending for some reason (not being invited to a private party, people the nova should avoid are attending, or the nova is currently attempting to lie low and avoid attracting attention). He'll avoid empty bars and nightclubs in favor of ones that are filled with people – and if they're being quiet, the nova must roll Willpower (also with a penalty equal to his permanent Taint) to keep from doing his best to liven things up and get the party going. Once the party's started, the nova will always stay for an hour, after which he may make another Willpower roll – if the roll fails, he'll stay at the party until he's thrown out or the party winds down on its own. Additionally, the nova will suffer a further +1 difficulty penalty on all Social rolls for interactions with sober-minded people – extremely dour folk such as fundamentalists will incur a penalty of +2 or worse! The flipside of this is that the nova gains a -1 difficulty bonus on all Social rolls with extroverted people and other folk who love a good party.

- **Romance Junkie:** Sometime during the mid-Twentieth Century, the feeling of sexual attraction came to be referred to in slang as “chemistry”. Ironically this term is quite accurate: the human brain produces a natural “love potion” known as phenylethylamine (PEA) that acts as the chemical basis for sexual attraction. And like many other mind-altering substances, it is possible for humans to become addicted to it – and novas are no exception. Whenever a nova with this aberration has any sort of encounter with an attractive member of the gender he or she is oriented towards, a Willpower roll must be made (with a penalty equal to the nova's permanent Taint) to avoid falling in love with that person. As a result of this addiction/compulsion, the nova will fall all over him – or herself trying to please his or her current beloved. Additionally, the nova must also make a Willpower roll (again with a penalty equal to his permanent Taint) to resist a request from his or her beloved. If she deems it appropriate, the Storyteller might alter the penalty depending on how much fulfilling the request would cost the nova. If the nova's beloved accepts his or her affections, the nova will become the stereotypical overpossessive boy – or girlfriend – the nova will be despondent when his or her object of affection isn't around, extremely jealous if others show an interest in his or her beloved, and generally oblivious to the world unless outside circumstances threaten the nova's relationship. The nova will also engage in frequent PDA's – public displays of affection – regardless of whether or not such acts are a bad idea or simply inappropriate at the time. It should be noted that the nova's beloved doesn't have to be sincere in accepting the nova's affection in order to keep the nova living in this romantic daze. Unless the nova has some means of detecting the lack of real affection on part of his or her beloved or is presented with strong evidence that proves it, he or she will have to make a Willpower roll (with the Taint penalty) in order to realize the faithlessness of his or her beloved. Otherwise, the relationship could go on for years, decades, or centuries! If the nova's

beloved rejects his or her affections or if the nova cannot meet anyone appealing, he or she will become depressed (and suffer a +1 difficulty penalty on all rolls) until he or she encounters another attractive person of the correct gender...

- **Romantic Irresistibility*:** A nova with this aberration has a dangerous knack for making people attracted to members of the nova's gender fall in love with him or her without any warning. If such a person makes eye contact with the nova, she/he must make a resisted Willpower roll against the nova's total dice pool for Seduction. The victim also suffers a penalty on the Willpower roll equal to the nova's Taint-derived penalty on rolls for social interactions with baselines. The number of net successes gained by the nova determines the degree of love-sickness the victim develops. One success indicates a mild crush, while 5 or more indicates a haunting obsession. The victim will have no reason (at first) to believe that his or her feelings for the nova aren't genuine – depending on how things develop with the nova, they may soon actually become genuine! This effect is impossible for the nova to predict or guard against, and occurs without any warning (read: the Storyteller has total control over when, where, and with whom this happens. This is best used for purposes of subplot or pure mischief on the Storyteller's part!). Novas who develop this aberration soon find that their social lives will rival the most convoluted soap-opera plots ever to grace the schedules of daytime television..

- **Sinister:** Something about a nova with this aberration really sets baseline humans on edge. The nova may be pleasant company, a stimulating conversationalist and a charming dinner guest, but still that indefinable quality about him raises their hackles – they won't be immediately hostile, but they will be somewhat uneasy. They can't really put a finger on the reason for it, but most baselines the nova encounters won't trust him any farther than one of them could throw a Main Battle Tank. In game terms, a nova with this aberration suffers twice his normal Taint-derived difficulty penalty on Social rolls where gaining the trust of baselines is concerned. There is one exception to this, however: baselines with Willpower scores equal to or greater than the nova's permanent Taint score can ignore the effects of this aberration. Baselines with the Common Sense Merit have an effective +2 to their Willpower scores for purposes of this aberration. This aberration also has no effect whatsoever on any variety of Inspired beings.

High-Level Aberrations

These aberrations are appropriate for novas with eight or more points of permanent Taint.

- **Prima Donna:** The nova with this aberration is extremely self-centered and conceited, and insists that she be recognized by people the world over as literally being the best in her field (not wholly unreasonable for a nova). If the nova hears that someone is better at her chosen pursuit than she is, she will seek to challenge the “upstart” to a public competition ASAP to determine who is the proverbial “Number 1”. The nova will use the reactions of the competition's audience as the indicator of victory or loss. If the nova wins the competition, she will limit herself to verbal gloating over her victory. It's when the nova loses that things will get hairy – the nova will then and there vow to make her rival's life a living hell, and then proceed to do so. The nova must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to

her permanent Taint) to avoid following these courses of action. Novas with this aberration will rack up impressive lists of enemies, to say the least. (**Note:** This aberration is not limited to female novas – male novas can be every bit as conceited and egotistical!)

- **Sponge:** Mega-Charismatic novas often seem to have the world for their oyster – everywhere they go, people are practically (sometimes literally) falling over themselves to serve their slightest whims. Receiving this sort of treatment on a constant basis can lead to a sense of entitlement on the part of a Mega-Charismatic nova, and Taint accumulation only makes this problem worse. A nova with this aberration will expect to receive the proverbial “red-carpet treatment” at all times, no matter where he goes or who he deals with. If he gets it, everything's fine as far as the nova's concerned – he's gotten his just due. The problem occurs when the nova isn't treated in this ostentatious manner – he must make a Willpower roll (with a penalty equal to his permanent Taint) to avoid demanding that he be given what he thinks is his due. If that demand isn't met, the nova will become very angry, and will likely resort to physical force in expressing his displeasure.

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